

Syria and Iran

Middle powers in a penetrated
regional system

Anoushiravan Ehteshami
and Raymond A. Hinnebusch



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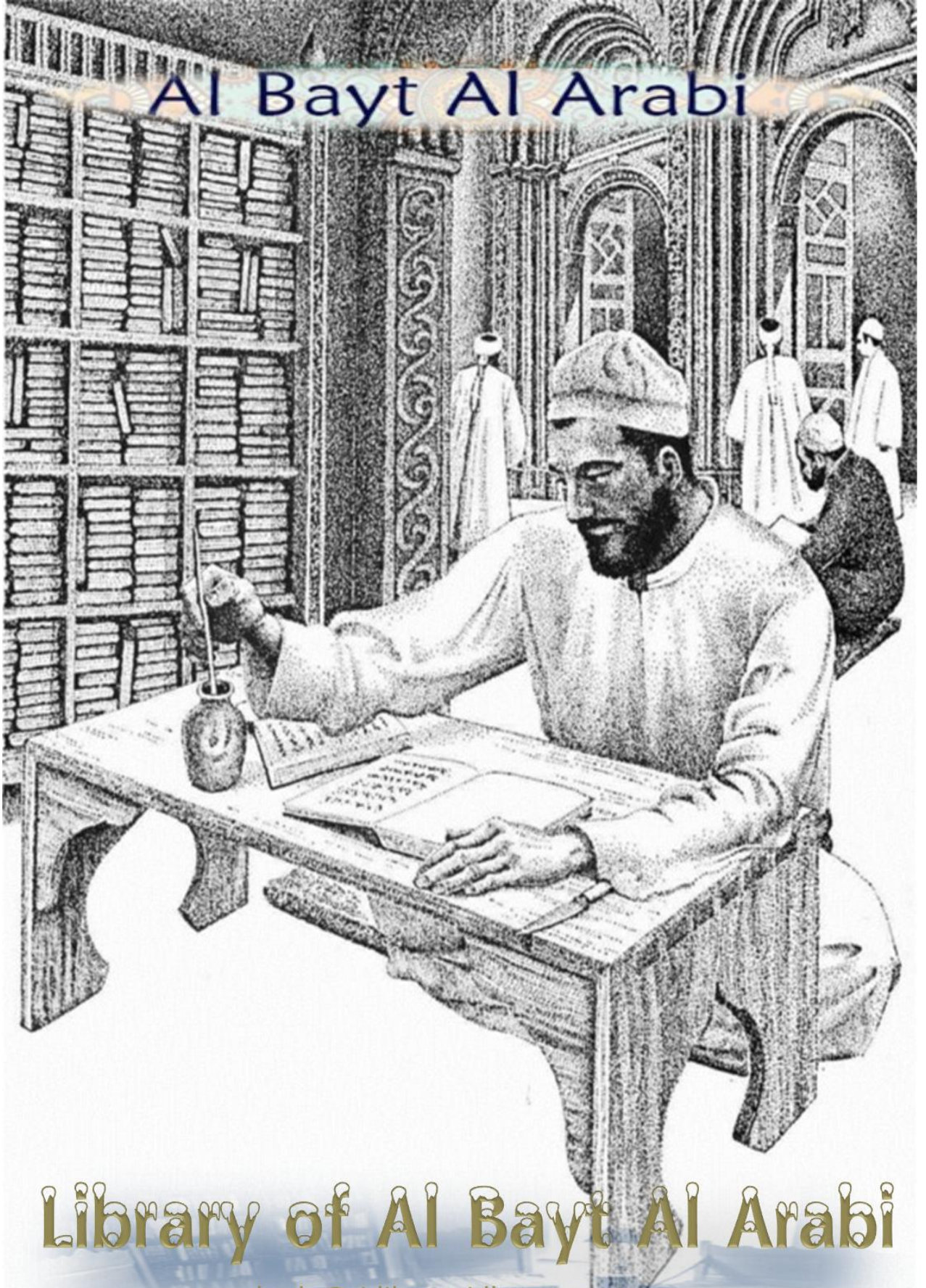
It has been the dominant view that both Syria in the 1980s and Iran in the 1990s acted as rogue states in the Middle East, threatening to upset the stability of the region. In this innovative study, Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch show that these two countries have in fact acted in a rational fashion, pursuing the aim of containing Western influence.

This book demonstrates how Syrian foreign policy resembles the 'rational actor' model and how Iran's government factions are compatible with a pragmatic foreign policy. Syria and Iran's foreign policies are shown to be conventional ones, of 'realist' diplomacy with their pursuance of a balance of power and spheres of influence. Their alliance with each other is also closely examined and found to be defensive in nature. The objectives in Lebanon and in the Arab-Israeli conflict are found to be limited.

Syria and Iran illustrates how these two countries, and their alliance, form an integral part of the balance of power in the Middle East. It is an exciting contribution to the study of the region, and its application of international relations concepts will be welcomed by those studying this area.

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We hope that none of those who played a part in helping us to complete this project are disappointed in its outcome. If shortcomings remain, however, the reader has only the authors to blame.

A. Ehteshami and R.A. Hinnebusch
September 1996

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text.

ACC	Arab Cooperation Council
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IDF	Israel Defence Forces
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
LNM	Lebanese National Movement
MORO	Moro National Liberation Front
NBC	nuclear/biological/chemical weapons
NIC	newly industrializing country
NIDL	New International Division of Labour
NSC	National Security Council (Iran)
NSF	National Salvation Front
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command
PKK	Kurdish Workers' Party
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestine National Council
SLA	South Lebanese Army
SSNP	Syria Social Nationalist Party
UNIFL	United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon

The abbreviations below refer to newspapers, periodical and information services cited in the text.

<i>APSD</i>	<i>APSDiplomat</i>
<i>CSM</i>	<i>Christian Science Monitor</i>
<i>FBIS</i>	<i>Foreign Broadcast Information Service</i>
<i>IEI</i>	<i>Insight Executive International</i>
<i>ME</i>	<i>The Middle East</i>
<i>MEED</i>	<i>Middle East Economic Digest</i>
<i>MEES</i>	<i>Middle East Economic Survey</i>
<i>MEI</i>	<i>Middle East International</i>
<i>MEIn</i>	<i>Middle East Insight</i>
<i>MEM</i>	<i>Mideast Mirror</i>
<i>MEQ</i>	<i>Middle East Quarterly</i>
<i>NR</i>	<i>National Review</i>
<i>SANA</i>	<i>Syrian Arab News Agency</i>
<i>SWB</i>	<i>BBC Summary of World Broadcasts</i>
<i>UIR</i>	<i>US Iran Review</i>
<i>WSJ</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>
Washington Report	<i>Washington Report on Middle East Affairs</i>

1 Introduction

Yesterday's radical force, embraced by Moscow's Marxist-Leninist leadership for most of this century, is today shifting southward... The real strategic potential for the use of radical power emerges in two capitals: Damascus and Tehran.

Walid Phares, *Global Affairs*, 1992

[T]he only vital and effective axis in the region is that between Tehran and Damascus. They are the two capitals which enjoy a degree of strength and a measure of independence that allows them to remain unaffected by direct political pressure.

Hizbollah Voice of the Oppressed (radio station), 27 April 1991

Is the Middle East haunted by the spectre of a dark alliance between the Lion and the Turban? Syria and Iran may indeed, as the above quotation from Walid Phares suggests, be the foremost remaining centres of power challenging the American-sponsored 'New World Order' in the Middle East. The two states are perhaps the chief self-proclaimed standard bearers of the contemporary world's remaining revisionist ideologies, pan-Arabism and pan-Islam. They are arguably the two remaining states in the region (after the defeat of Iraq) which have been most insistent on maintaining their autonomy and on pursuing agendas not necessarily to the liking of the dominant Western world powers. Their alliance, maintained for a decade and a half, forms an axis balancing pro-Western regimes in the region. Certainly, the US government, obsessed with the supposed threat from Iran, appears to believe that breaking the alliance through a Syrian-Israeli peace is a key to isolating radical forces in the Middle East (Speech of Anthony Lake, US National Security Advisor in *MEM* 19 May 1994). But are the foreign policies of Syria and Iran, and their alliance, best interpreted as revisionist or—as the Hizbollah broadcast would have it—as attempts to defend their autonomy against intensive Western penetration of the

Middle East? The alliance, after all, originated in mutual aid that Syria and Iran gave each other against aggression—the Iraqi invasion of Iran and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

It is arguable whether their alliance is ‘strategic’ as Syrian and Iranian leaders insist, that is, a coherent ‘axis’ acting in concert to shape the Middle East power balance. The alliance would appear to be far less than a NATO and a good deal more than an *ad hoc* coalition like that mobilized against Iraq in the Gulf war. If their regimes are dissimilar and if their interests have periodically clashed in Lebanon and over the peace process, their stubbornly independent policies do make them the odd men out in the Middle East, where most states defer to Western interests. We will not wish to argue that they constitute an axis operative on all fronts but, at a minimum, their alliance does buttress their individual ability to pursue similar struggles, sometimes against common enemies, and they have accumulated a considerable history of coordinating on regional policy matters. This study will, finally, argue that they have in common their status as ‘regional middle powers’ which seek regional leadership in the name of defending regional autonomy.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF THIRD WORLD FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

The analysis of Syria and Iran will be related to the controversies over foreign policy-making in Third World countries. In what has perhaps become the dominant view, Third World foreign policies are often argued to be quite different from the rational pursuit of national interest supposedly characteristic of developed states. Third World states, particularly radical ones, are said to be driven by flawed ideological worldviews and the need of unstable authoritarian regimes to legitimize their rule through the manufacture of foreign enemies. Since their policies are irrational and domestically rooted, the argument goes, it would do little good to accommodate their interests or address their security fears. Indeed, containment and isolation are currently prescribed for Iran and Iraq, while in the 1980s this was the conventional wisdom as regards Syria.

Walid Phares (1992) applies an unnuanced version of this approach to the Syrian-Iranian alliance. He argues that this ‘axis’ has a long-term plan to challenge the West. Driven by unrelenting revisionism, Syria’s despotic Alawi dictatorship seeks the destabilization of moderate regimes, the annexation of Lebanon and the destruction of Israel. Iran seeks to export Islamic revolution against moderate Gulf regimes, in the first instance, but also to Central Asia, Egypt and the Maghreb as part of a struggle against American influence in the region. Both use Israel as a scapegoat and means of legitimizing their mission. Both aim to destroy the peace process. They

resort, he claims, to all forms of coercion, from the threat of weapons of mass destruction to terrorism. They head a new Comintern of subversive movements throughout the Middle East and have made Lebanon, especially the Bekaa Valley, a headquarters of international terrorism. They seek to replace Saddam with a sympathetic Iraqi government, thus establishing territorial contiguity from Lebanon to Pakistan, and laying the foundations of a new Arab-Islamic empire. While this view may be more alarmist than most, milder versions of it hold wide currency in policy-making spheres.

There are, however, alternative models for understanding the foreign policies of states like Iran and Syria. *Systemic explanations* assume that foreign policy behaviour derives from the insecure nature of the state system and, specifically, that external threats precipitate power-balancing strategies. This study will argue that Syrian and Iranian behaviour is in great part derived from the exceptionally unstable and threatening systemic arena in which these states operate and that power balancing has taken the form of a drive to become 'regional middle powers'. If this alternative explanation is valid, the appropriate response to Syria and Iran could be to recognize and at least partially to satisfy their national interests and security concerns.

Domestic politics are not, of course, irrelevant to Syrian and Iranian foreign policy, but alternative kinds of explanation, such as the *bureaucratic politics* model, could possibly be more helpful in understanding these cases than one attributing an unremitting revisionism to the very nature of the regimes. If applied to the Iranian case, a bureaucratic politics model would alert one to the possibility that Iranian policy is partly the product of intra-elite conflict between pragmatists most concerned with economic stabilization and revisionist ideologues. To the extent that this model has explanatory power, an appropriate policy towards Iran would be to draw it further into the global economy and to pursue conciliatory policies likely to strengthen the pragmatists.

This study will try to show that these alternative approaches are more useful for understanding Syrian and Iranian policy and that, in fact, their behaviour is far from being irrational. If these regimes, seen at one time or another in conventional wisdom as among the most 'crazy' of Third World crazy states, can be shown to pursue rational foreign policies determined by the same factors that shape those of 'normal' states, the claim that Third World foreign policies are *sui generis* would be put in serious doubt.

SYRIA, IRAN AND THE ALTERNATIVE VIEWS OF WORLD ORDER

Syrian and Iranian foreign policies must be interpreted in the context of the emerging post-bipolar world. Samuel P. Huntington (1993) proposes that a

cultural 'clash of civilizations' pitting the West against Muslim and other non-Western civilizations has superseded not only the Cold War but traditional national interests as the new basis of global conflict. Benjamin Barber (1992) sees nation-states now caught in the global struggle between Jihad, a rebellion of religious fundamentalism and ethnic fragmentation, and 'McWorld', the forces sweeping the world into a uniform, Western-centred world economy and culture.

But are states uniformly being swept along by economic globalization and civilizational conflict or do their foreign policies continue to be shaped in good part by such traditional factors as national interest? Huntington's critics argue that there is nothing new about the New World Order: the cleavage is not a clash of cultures but a power struggle over US and Western dominance and intervention in the non-Western and particularly the Muslim world (Muzaffar 1994).

This study will suggest a different way of looking at the role of Syria and Iran in the New World Order, namely, that they are facing an external arena which combines traditional security threats with growing transnational forces. Economic globalization and cultural penetration have indeed stimulated a defensive reaction in the Middle East, but the Syrian and Iranian states are neither being swept away by them nor waging a civilizational counteroffensive. Rather, they are seeking to acquire the regional power to manage, even to benefit from, these global forces without losing their autonomy.

The study will even argue that the Syrian-Iranian alliance is a force for regional stability. Among the greatest long-term threats to the regional system is its delegitimization from excessive subordination to global forces while short-term instability results from regional imbalances of power. The Syrian-Iranian alliance could be considered essential to a power balance in the region and to defending the regional autonomy arguably crucial to the legitimization of the regional order. Even to the extent that an element of revisionism still informs their foreign policies, if Syrian and Iranian interests could be attached to the *status quo* regional order, the alliance would certainly become a force for stability. Were they to legitimize this order, oppositionist movements would lack key state patrons and be deprived of their main ideologies. The importance of this can be seen in the second Gulf war, in which Syria's support for the anti-Iraq intervention and Iran's acquiescence in it was perceived, probably correctly, to have given some legitimization to a venture which otherwise might have unleashed broad popular opposition.

THE PLAN OF THE STUDY

In Chapter 2 the Syrian and Iranian cases are placed in the context of theories about international relations and foreign policy of the Middle East.

Chapters 3 and 4 separately examine Iranian and Syrian foreign policies, explore their determinants, the decision-making processes involved, and the evolution of these policies over time, particularly as they bear on regional change and stability.

In Chapter 5 the alliance between the two states is examined. It will be viewed chiefly as a reaction to regional and global systemic factors—notably, commonly perceived threats from the West, Israel and Iraq—and only secondarily as a product of domestic politics. The alliance will also be interpreted as constituting a new alignment filling part of the power vacuum following on the virtual collapse of any semblance of an Arab order in the 1980s.

In the next two chapters, the consequences of Syrian and Iranian foreign policy and of their alliance for regional peace and stability are assessed by examining their roles in two of the main crises of the Middle East, the Lebanese civil war and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Chapter 6 examines their roles in the struggle for Lebanon, including the political mobilization of the Lebanese Shi'a, and the conflict in south Lebanon where contiguous Syrian, Iranian and Israeli interests have collided, threatening regional stability. Chapter 7 examines divergent Syrian and Iranian policies towards the peace process, the impact of the process on the alliance and of the alliance on the prospects of a durable regional peace settlement.

Chapter 8 draws some conclusions from the case about the nature of foreign policy behaviour and the dynamics of regional systems in the Third World, and particularly in the Middle East.

2 Middle East international relations

A conceptual framework

This chapter lays out a conceptual framework for understanding Syrian and Iranian foreign policy and behaviour, including their alliance. It seeks to locate the Syrian and Iranian cases in the wider contexts of international relations and foreign policy theory.

First, the concept of '*regional middle powers*', taken to capture Syria and Iran's systemic position and general foreign policy role, will be defined. Second, the unstable nature of the regional *systemic environment* in which Syrian and Iranian decision-makers operate will be examined. Third, theories of *foreign policy determinants* and of the foreign policy process will be surveyed in search of concepts appropriate to the Syrian and Iranian cases. Finally, the relevance of these factors for understanding the Syrian-Iranian alliance, their intervention in Lebanon and their roles in the peace process will be briefly suggested.

REGIONAL MIDDLE POWERS

What role might states such as Syria and Iran be expected to play in the global system? If the distribution of power is the defining characteristic of the international state system, as realist theory holds, then the role of states is likely to be defined by their relative power ranking. While the weak powers of the Third World should be expected to be preoccupied initially with mere survival and defence of independence, as developing states are internally consolidated, the drive to overcome weakness in the external arena may become, by the very logic of the state system, a major preoccupation. States aggrieved by the hegemony of external powers over the regional system can, in particular, be expected to aspire to the status of what we will call *regional middle powers* (Neumann *et al.* 1992).¹

By regional middle powers we mean states which may rank as no more than middle powers in the global system but which are key actors in their regional systems. While the goals and geographical range of regional

powers are more modest than those of great powers and centre on regional politics, their regional behaviour, determined by similar systemic rules, is likely to approximate that of larger powers in playing the 'realist' game. They are distinguishable from lesser regional powers by their assertion of regional leadership in the name of more general regional interests, by their centrality to the regional power balance, their regional spheres of influence and by their ability, from a credible deterrent capability, to resist a coalition of other regional states against them. Finally, such powers generally have leaders enjoying more than local stature and some extra-regional influence. Syria and Iran arguably qualify on all these grounds.

The relation of regional middle powers to the global great powers is ambiguous. Although they may be sufficiently developed economically, or enjoy sufficient natural resources, to count in the semi-periphery (Buzan 1991; Ehteshami 1992b), these powers are still economically and technologically dependent on the core, and can at best hope to minimize the constraints of dependency on their autonomy by diversifying their economic links. Yet, politically, regional middle powers are, as Kapur (1985) argues, potentially barriers to the globalization of superpower hegemony. Indeed, regional middle powers may arise to the extent that global great powers' inability to directly control more peripheral regions provides the opportunity. According to Wight (1978), middle powers are generally able to escape diplomatic isolation and military intervention at the hands of great powers since the latter may need their support against rivals, and even a hostile great power will normally be deterred (by the likely costs) from attacking a middle power.

As Murden (1995) argues, regional middle powers typically see great power penetration and regulation as threatening to their sovereignty, only selectively accept Western-originated international norms and regimes, such as arms control, and often pursue regional alliances resistant to great power hegemony. They also typically seek to maximize autonomy by balancing the regional impact of great powers. The more intrusive the great power presence has been historically, the more likely regional powers will see the great powers as a threat. In the highly penetrated Middle East, Iran and Syria stand out as the regional powers which have invested most in policies of regional autonomy intended to check this penetration.

Today, regional powers arguably have a vital interest in decisively shaping the redistribution of power attendant on the end of bipolarity. By contrast to East Asia, where the interest of middle powers is to maintain a US presence to balance the region's great powers, Japan and China (Dibb 1995), in the Middle East this means, since the collapse of the countervailing Soviet superpower, containing American hegemony. Regional middle powers like Syria and Iran cannot realistically hope to wholly exclude

Table 1 Middle East regional middle powers

	<i>Iran</i>	<i>Syria</i>	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>S. Arabia</i>	<i>Turkey</i>
Area (sq. miles)	636,293	71,498	8,019	386,660	168,754	756,981	301,303
Population (mil.)	65.6	14.4	5.1	61	19.9	18.2	60.6
GDP, 1993 (bil. US \$)	60	26.7	69.6	43.3	17.0	125.5	173.7
Armed forces (1,000)	513	408	177.5 ^a	440	382	161	503.8
Defence expend., 1992 (bil. US \$)	2.3	2.2	6.9	2.1	2.5	35.5 ^b	6.3
Combat aircraft	295	591	628 ^c	551	316	292	555
Submarines	2	1	3	3	0	0	15
Surface combat craft	50 ^d	31	55	49	12	37	66
MB tanks	1,245	4,500	3,895	3,234	2,200	770	4,919

Notes: *a* excluding 430,000 reserves *b* 1991 *c* includes estimated 250 in storage *d* includes missile craft.

Sources: *IISS*, The Military Balance 1994–1995, London: Brassey's, 1994; Congressional Quarterly: The Middle East, Washington, D.C., 1994.

American power but they can hope to constrain it, to force recognition of their interests and perhaps even to win recognition as legitimate regional leaders.

Regional middle powers must, presumably, possess a reasonable base of power resources. Arguably, Syria and Iran qualify on these grounds. As Table 1 shows, Iran certainly has all the objective attributes of a regional power. Syria is less well-endowed in population and size of economy but has channelled its resources into a military capability and hence a regional role exceeding what might be expected from its objective power base. Bids for regional power status may, of course, fail, typically because of marginal location or insufficient economic base; Syria is handicapped by the latter while Iran's challenge, as regards the Middle East system, is access to the geographic core of the region.

A PENETRATED REGIONAL SYSTEM: THE SYSTEMIC ROOTS OF INSTABILITY

The Middle East, the external arena in which decision-makers operate, is exceptionally unstable owing to the precarious legitimacy, pervasive insecurity and exceptional penetration by hegemonic global powers. Syrian and Iranian foreign policy is, in great part, a reaction to this environment.

The international system and the Middle East

The global system's regional impact is exceptionally intense in the Middle East because the great powers, attracted by its strategic location, immense oil reserves and the presence of Israel, have historically penetrated and shaped it far more than other regions. The result—a particular version of power balancing—is described by L. Carl Brown (1984) as the 'Near Eastern Game'. Historically, the great powers have acted to prevent any Middle Eastern power from achieving hegemony and organizing a Middle East system resistant to their penetration, while Middle East states (or substate groups at odds with the state) have invited in global powers and tried to use their resources and leverage in local conflicts. Only their rivalry prevented any one great power from imposing total hegemony on the region.

Today, the global system continues its penetration of the region through treaties, bases, arms transfers and military intervention; it is, as a result, arguably the most militarized and penetrated of Third World regions. Although usually justified as a defence of the *status quo*, such penetration frequently upsets the local power balance, exacerbates insecurity and opens the door to the frequent wars of the region; arguably power imbalances created by the arming of Israel and Iraq opened the door to the last two major wars, the 1982

invasion of Lebanon and the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, respectively. The Western intervention against Iraq replicates the traditional unwillingness of the great powers to permit any local power to 'organize the system'.

Global penetration and local subordination constitute a long-term cause of regional instability because they tend to delegitimize local states and the regional state system generally. Popular resistance movements against foreign intervention have generated periodic waves of instability and given rise to revisionist states which have threatened to upset the power balance. The current Syrian and Iranian regimes are perhaps the most important enduring residues of the last two such waves, the Arab nationalism of the 1950s and the Islamic movement of the 1980s. Today, the Syrian Ba'ath regime institutionalizes a movement originally generated by pan-Arab resistance to Israel, and the Islamic regime in Iran is the main challenge to Western control of Persian Gulf oil.

The exceptional penetration of the Middle East by the international system cannot be fully captured without taking account of the system of economic dependency as analysed by dependency/world systems theory (Galtung 1971; Wallerstein 1974). In this view, underlying and shaping interstate relations is a global economic web in which the core of the international capitalist system subordinates peripheral local economies; local client elites, either sharing class interests with core elites or constrained by economic dependency, lose much of the sovereignty assumed in the realist model and cease to follow the classic state behaviour predicted by it. Most Middle East states are primary producers dependent for food, markets, technology and manufactured goods on the core capitalist states, while some have investments in the West which make their elites virtual auxiliaries of the core economies. Nowhere is the absence of autonomous indigenous economies more striking.

Syria and Iran, therefore, operate in a regional environment lacking economic autonomy; their elites are not, however, overt clients and, indeed, stand out for their efforts to minimize dependency and the constraints it generates on foreign policy. Iran, moreover, has a not unrealistic ambition to achieve the newly industrializing country (NIC) status which would provide the economic base of national autonomy. Nevertheless, whatever their drive to maximize self-sufficiency or diversify dependency, neither state has escaped direct or indirect economic dependence on the core states. Given the tension between the aspiration for autonomy and the realities of economic dependence, the relation between Syrian and Iranian elites and the core is arguably less one of shared interests (expected in dependency theory) than relations of unequal bargaining in which the dominant powers use rewards, threats and punishments to influence their foreign policy (Moon 1983).

Current change in the global system, notably the end of bipolarity, is bound to have a profound effect on the regional system. From the point of view of states like Syria and Iran, bipolarity, in institutionalizing Soviet checks on Western freedom of action in the Middle East and permitting local actors to exploit superpower rivalry, provided exceptionally favourable conditions to carve out regional autonomy. While the global system may currently be moving towards multipolarity, this is not uniformly so. Rather, change in the international system *varies regionally* and, as it impacts on the Middle East, there has been a strong short-term tendency towards unipolarity as the USA fills the power vacuum left by Soviet withdrawal after defeating the ambitious attempt by Iraq to organize the regional system against it. American hegemony is the main obstacle to the Syrian and Iranian bids for regional power status and autonomy. Thus, the US attempt to promote a New World Order in the Middle East includes military reinforcement of Israel and the Gulf states, in great part against Syria and Iran, as well as containment of the latter's attempts to acquire Nuclear/Biological/Chemical (NBC) weapons and missile technologies. The post-bipolar loss of purpose by the non-aligned movement and the decline of Arab nationalism have also deprived these aspiring regional powers of a legitimacy buffer against the imposition of the US-designed world order in the region.

There is, however, a disjuncture between the pre-eminent global military power of the USA and the growing multipolarity of the international economic system manifest in the rise of economic conflicts of interests among the capitalist core countries which regional powers may potentially exploit. Given the less than overwhelming global economic hegemony of the US, it may be unable to sustain unipolarity in the Middle East and Iraq's defeat may represent a mere temporary set-back to the rise of regional powers.

The challenge of states like Syria and Iran is to redefine their regional leadership roles in a realistic way which combines some accommodation with the US-led West while still aiming to dilute US hegemony. In fact, Syria and Iran seek to counter American hegemony and the decline of the non-aligned bloc through balancing: reinforcing their bilateral relation and generating a multipolar environment in the Middle East. This involves drawing in potentially countervailing powers such as China, North Korea and Russia in the military/security field and Europe and Japan in the economic realm. Contrary, however, to those who see Syria and Iran as driven by reckless irredentism and ideology, their adjustment to the collapse of bipolarity has been prudent and measured, especially by contrast to that of Saddam's Iraq—notwithstanding Western attempts throughout the 1980s to co-opt Iraq as a pillar of the pro-Western regional order while vilifying Syria and Iran.

Another transforming tendency in the global system is the '*complex interdependence*' which is incorporating the Middle East more tightly into the world system (Keohane and Nye 1977). Seyom Brown refers to 'polyarchy' because, in his view, states have lost their monopoly of governance to actors at both a higher and lower level (Brown 1984). Non-state global actors such as multinational corporations, congeries of cosmopolitan transnational elites, drug cartels and NGOs on the one hand, and subnational movements—tribes, ethnic and religious groups—on the other, are challenging the ability of states to control their borders.

Some analysts envision complex interdependence as reducing the conflicts typical of state systems, but a global interdependence which permits affluent core elites to manipulate market and media power generates alienation among the less cosmopolitan, more powerless populations; nowhere is this sense of victimization stronger than in the Islamic Middle East. Moreover, as Brown argues, where societies are most vulnerable to transnational penetration and the state least able to generate exclusive national loyalties, the state is most assertive and least tolerant of penetration. The attempt by aspiring regional powers like Iran to limit international influence and to reinforce a culturally autonomous regional system mobilizing the disenfranchised under the banners of nationalism and religion may express the main global cleavage in the aftermath of bipolarity. To this extent, a 'clash of civilizations' may be at work, as Huntington (1993) says, but 'Islamic Jiahd' expresses, less an-equal contest with Western culture than the last resistance of those marginalized and threatened by 'McWorld' (Barber 1992).

The conflicting dependency and realist paradigms may reflect the real-world conflict of a persisting interstate system and growing transstate interdependence. It may be that the more a state is integrated into transnational networks the more it behaves according to the dependency model (i.e., its elites come to share core interests) and the less it enjoys the sovereignty assumed in the realist model or behaves according to the norms of the latter (balancing, etc.). However, despite the advance of transstate webs, since their reach is *uneven*, pockets and residues of sovereignty keep state system behaviour alive in Third World regions. This is especially so of more autonomous countries like Syria and Iran.

Regional environment

Despite the distorting effects of global penetration in the Middle East, the imposition of a Western-style state system in the region has made it in good part subject to the classic operative rules of international politics as described by realist theory: the pursuit of security through power maximization

(Morgenthau 1978; Waltz 1959). Indeed, according to Yaniv (1987), compared to other global subsystems, an exaggerated version of the insecurity depicted in the realist model prevails in the Middle East. It is a 'primitive' anarchic subsystem where the low degree of institutionalization of norms and rules in relations between states causes deep insecurity, militarization and resort to violence. In such an environment, balancing and alliances are crucial to security but are, nevertheless, very unstable.

Such 'realist' relevance is most apparent in the two major conflict foci of the region which pit Arab and non-Arab actors, the Gulf subsystem, where Iran is central, and the Arab-Israeli subsystem where Syria is central. The Gulf/Arabian Peninsula subsystem is an exceptional magnet, by virtue of its oil reserves, for external intervention and conflict. The Arab-Israeli subsystem results from a settler state established against regional resistance and highly dependent on external support for its survival. Both subsystems periodically destabilize the whole regional order. Iranian and Syrian behaviour is arguably highly determined by their central role in these two conflict subsystems and highly predictable by realist models of threat and power struggle. What stability obtains, rests, in the absence of systemic legitimacy, almost entirely on an unstable power balance. For example, Evron (1987) has argued that Syria and Israel have developed a 'deterrence relationship'. In the post-Gulf war period, Turkey seems to be integrating more closely into the Middle East system and Syrian-Turkish-Iranian relations may increasingly manifest behaviour readily predicted by realist-stressed systemic variables.

Because insecurity also exists within the Arab core of the Middle East system, realist-predicted behaviour is also much in evidence there, notably anti-hegemonic balancing (Taylor 1982; Evron and Bar-Simantov 1976). Syria's alliance with Iran against Iraq can be partly explained by this dynamic. Nevertheless, this conventional state behaviour is qualified by the specific features which set the Arab core of the Middle East regional system apart from other Third World regions, namely, a unique linguistic and cultural homogeneity and the high level of transstate interconnectedness. The latter is manifested in the exceptional frequency of intergovernmental visits, the frequent transstate movement of persons, goods, workers, capital and information, and common transstate institutions such as the Arab League. As a result, transstate identities, above all Arabism and Islam, are exceptionally strong, and for many people these are the most compelling unit of political identity and nationhood. To varying degrees, therefore, the states are deprived of the peculiar legitimacy which accrues to those which are accepted as representing a distinct nation (Noble 1991; Thompson 1981).

This exceptional regional environment shapes unusual patterns of foreign policy behaviour. Ambitious states have far greater potential than elsewhere to use transstate appeals as instruments of foreign policy, since the loyalties of citizens may be attracted by the leaders of other states which seem better to represent Arabism or Islam (or some other substate identity), behaviour anomalous in a nation-state system. Also, foreign policy has more immediate implications for internal security than elsewhere. State leaders, to protect their domestic support, must legitimize themselves by asserting their own Arab nationalist credentials and discrediting those of rival states (Kienle 1990:1–30). Foreign policies must, as Korany (1988) puts it, strike a balance between *raison de la nation* and *raison d'état*. States with regional leadership ambitions, such as Syria, have tried to bridge this gap by defining a *role-conception*—leader of the Arab cause—giving it a distinctive place or mission within the larger Arab community.

A similar dynamic exists in so far as the Islamic resurgence has redefined the transstate community in Islamic terms. Transnational appeals have linked the revolutionary regime in Iran with Islamic opposition movements in many Arab states; this was normally most intense where Shi'ite minorities, responsive to the special Shi'ite cast of Iranian Islam, were concentrated, above all in Lebanon. The Iranian regime's legitimacy also depends on reconciling its roles as a state and as leader of a transstate movement.

Pan-Arab solidarity has declined before a revival of narrower loyalties to tribal and sect (best seen in the Lebanese civil war), a parallel resurgence of identity with the larger Islamic community and the consolidation of separate states pursuing their own interests frequently at the expense of the putative pan-Arab interest. While the emergence of true nation-states is obstructed by the competition of larger and smaller units of identity, the very durability of the states as the customary framework of political life, the material interests attached to or dispensed by them and their role in obstructing a viable regional economy may be laying the foundations for entities closer to classic nation-states than have hitherto existed in the Arab world. Reinforcing this was the erosion of common Arab interests by the sharpening in the 1980s of the rich-poor divide as the oil producers exported their surplus capital to the West while economic growth stalled in the non-oil-producing states. The virtual collapse of any semblance of pan-Arab order in the 1980s created a power vacuum opening the Arab world to Western and Israeli penetration. This may have invited the formation of the Syrian-Iranian alliance as a replacement force to counterbalance this penetration.

It is, however, premature to write the obituary for pan-Arabism. As the transstate support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war illustrates, Arab nationalism remains a submerged force which can flare up in times of

crisis or when external power in support of the *status quo* is seen to falter. Also, in spite of a certain ideological contradiction, Arab nationalism and revolutionary Islam—which remains very much alive—share cultural affinities and can readily politically coalesce against external threats, as was so in the Islamic popular reaction against the anti-Iraq Western intervention. Thus, the Arab world remains caught in a limbo between transstate Islamic and pan-Arab sentiments, the reality of conflicting states with their own interests and the recurrent threat of state fragmentation.

In summary, Syrian and Iranian foreign policy must, in great part, be understood as shaped by the distinctive features of the regional system: 1) high levels of international penetration, dependency and consequent weakness of the regional system's legitimacy, 2) the weakness and vulnerability of states to transstate regional penetration because of the poor correspondence between state and political identity, and 3) intense insecurity, militarization and vulnerability to imbalances of power. Their roles as aspiring regional powers address these vulnerabilities: to maximize autonomy, maintain a power balance against threats and assert spheres of influence on the basis of transstate identities.

FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

Three alternative sources of foreign policy can plausibly claim to be relevant in states like Iran and Syria. At one pole is the realist model in which foreign policy is chiefly determined by systemic constraints and opportunities, regardless of ideology and internal politics, since survival in that anarchic arena requires all states, over the long run at least, to adopt certain rational behaviour, such as power maximization and balancing strategies. The model assumes that a relatively autonomous unitary decision-maker weighs costs and benefits, unconstrained by public opinion or ideology. This 'rational actor' pursues a geopolitically shaped national interest expressed in limited (not ideological or revolutionary) goals (Allison 1971; Morgenthau 1978). While the ideal type of the realist school exists nowhere in pure form, a strong legitimate state where the public defers to elites in foreign policymaking comes closest. According to many analysts, this model is inapplicable to Third World states because these features are absent.

At the other extreme are models which claim Third World foreign policy is essentially *irrational*, largely because of domestic weaknesses which subordinate foreign policy to the internal power struggle. Unconsolidated regimes lacking legitimacy, strong institutions and popular support, and poorly corresponding to a felt national community, are too concerned with internal survival to conduct effective foreign policy. Indeed,

according to Steven David (1991), in weak Third World states, the anarchic struggle for power may be more in evidence internally than externally: while regimes are frequently overthrown from within, Third World states lack, he claims, the military capability to threaten their neighbours and seldom actually face invasion or annexation. According to Goode (1962), foreign policy is *recruited to the task of state-building*: being 'domestic policy pursued by other means', it is deployed against the heterogeneity of society to generate a sense of national loyalty to the state. Legitimizing new power in societies deeply resentful of foreign domination, not unnaturally, may take the form of an anti-imperialism. In Calvert's (1986) 'dramatic actor model', foreign policy, in the absence of real capabilities, is largely anti-imperialist rhetoric designed to win domestic support and a cheap substitute for delivering scarce economic benefits or political rights. Regimes tend to exaggerate or create external threats to divert attention from internal troubles (Dawisha 1988). Intra-elite rivalries, in which foreign policy becomes an instrument, defeat foreign policy coherence. In short, unstable authoritarian or revolutionary regimes, seeking to consolidate themselves, produce foreign policies which, being either ineffective or needlessly belligerent, are irrational from the point of view of managing the external arena.

Analysts of Syria are divided over these rival models. Two prominent biographical studies of Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad apply versions of the realist model, with Asad being seen as an astute 'Sphinx of Damascus' (Maoz 1988) engaged in a 'struggle for the Middle East' (Seale 1988). Daniel Pipes (1990: 115–193) applies a version of the domestic politics models to Syria (in a way similar to Kennan's (1947) analysis of the domestic roots of Soviet expansion). Syrian policy is attributed, not to systemic threats but to the authoritarian nature of the regime which, being unalloyed sectarian rule, needs an irredentist ideology to divert attention from internal oppression. There are two schools of thought on Iranian foreign policy as well: one stresses ideology and is compatible with Kennan's stress on the need of revolutions to export their ideologies in order to legitimize and consolidate themselves at home; the opposing school focuses on state interests and nationalism (Esposito and Piscatori 1990).

There are several problems with the uncritical application of domestic politics models. First, quantitative cross-national studies find much stronger links between foreign policy and national attributes (interests) or the external arena than between policy and internal regime type or domestic conflict (McGowan and Shapiro 1973).² The one quantitative study done (Burrows and Specter 1973) of Syria—on the period of high internal conflict, instability and intra-elite rivalry between 1963 and 1967 when the internal/ external

link seemed most plausible—found that domestic and external politics *varied independently of each other*.

Second, David's claim that Third World states do not face external threats is arguably inapplicable to the Middle East, where external threats are likely to be of at least equal weight compared to internal ones. Indeed, it is possible that external conflict may affect internal politics more than the reverse. Weak states which perform poorly in foreign policy or lose a war may well face de-legitimization and instability at home. On the other hand, a threatening external environment, particularly periods of war and war preparation, is historically a crucible of state centralization and strengthening which increases the power of national security elites within regimes. In short, external threats may spur state strengthening, as has long been recognized to be the case in the European experience (Tilly 1975).

Third, arguments which place Third World states uniformly on the negative side of *dichotomies* such as strong/legitimate versus weak/illegitimate may be too simple to capture their reality. These states vary widely in their levels of consolidation, resources and leadership. The two main explanations for the weak or non-autonomous Third World state are: 1) the neo-patrimonial (Akhavi 1975) or praetorian (Huntington 1968; Perlmutter 1974) in which the state, lacking institutionalization or legitimacy, is seen, respectively, as either too weak to govern or as the instrument of a primordial group, and 2) the instrumentalist Marxist/dependency approaches in which it is seen as the instrument of a 'comprador' ruling class too dependent on the world capitalist system to defend the national interest (Farsoun and Carroll 1978).³

But, in fact, the literature on 'bringing the state back in' has recognized the dangers of reductionism in such approaches (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985). There is plenty of evidence that some Third World states have attained relative autonomy of the dominant class through creation of a Bonapartist regime above classes (Marx 1898; Trimberger 1978);⁴ they may also contain their vulnerability to praetorian instability and dependence on neo-patrimonial strategies through creation of single party and corporatist institutions (Huntington 1974; Schmitter 1974). In such states, legitimacy may be fragile, institutionalization partial and participation limited rather than wholly absent (Chalmers 1977; Dawisha and Zartman 1988; Nelson 1987).⁵ As such, state strength may be best thought of as a *continuum* along which different regimes might be located and may *move over time*. Without acquiring all the attributes of strong states, Third World regimes may be sufficiently consolidated that their foreign policies are less plausibly attributed to internal vulnerabilities and their ability to conduct a rational foreign policy is significantly enhanced. In both the Syrian and Iranian cases, the notion of a weak state is less plausible than one which

accepts considerable movement away from purely praetorian, patrimonial and unstable regimes; arguably, both regimes have passed the early period of fragility and created regimes with the autonomy to craft foreign policies in good part in response to foreign threats and opportunities.

Nevertheless, the domestic politics model holds considerable validity. First, foreign policy is conditioned by the ideology of a regime which inevitably reflects the interests and values of internal social forces. Second, even in a consolidated regime, domestic politics is not insulated from foreign policy, as realism implies. Since legitimacy typically remains fragile and rooted in nationalism, stability depends in good part on a nationalist foreign policy. Regime autonomy may permit tactical flexibility dictated by *raison d'état* in the short run, but long-run stability requires that foreign policy be compatible with the base of a regime's nationalist legitimacy. While internal stability is not hostage to a constant manipulation of external threats, major changes in foreign policy goals will likely require adjustments in a regime's internal coalition and legitimacy basis—which a consolidated regime may accomplish without suffering de-stabilization.

A third view of the roots of foreign policy sees economics, rather than power, as the main determinant. For Marxists, this means the state's long-term function in securing conditions for capital accumulation, which in turn, provides the state a fiscal basis for its own existence. Indeed, in economically dependent Third World states, foreign policy is often deployed for economic resource mobilization which requires accommodation to the demands of the economic core states (Dessouki 1993). With the end to an alternative socialist economic bloc, Third World countries are particularly vulnerable to the demands of the international capitalist economy, which is likely to be as powerful a constraint as is the balance of power.

However, the extent to which economic needs shape foreign policy varies in different states. Elites in relatively strong states, which have some autonomy of dominant classes, can tailor external economic relations to the interests of the national economy and minimize dependency (Smith 1981). Even where economic bargaining relations are highly asymmetrical, in issue areas where the weaker party has high preferences, it may very well defend its foreign policy autonomy. A second possible condition which may allow elites to avoid subordinating foreign policy to the requisites of capital accumulation is, in principle, available to *rentier* states (Bablawi and Luciani 1987). Oil wealth relieves the state of some of the need to attend to the normal requisites of capital accumulation while freeing foreign policy of certain economic constraints, e.g., it permits massive arms purchases without immediately extracting their cost from society. In spite of transnational economic forces, it is possible, in certain situations, to retain the realist idea of state elites as rational actors with some ability to contain and even manipulate these forces.

Yet, oil economies highly dependent on export of a single commodity and on the import of everything from food to machinery are, in the longer run, highly vulnerable to international economic pressures and fluctuations, especially as they undertake import substitute industrialization. Given the fragile legitimacy of these states, *rentier* theory argues that stability depends on the liberal internal use of rent to cement clientage networks, pacify the military, etc. Once a regime becomes so dependent on rent for survival, its foreign policy may be driven by the need to preserve it.

In Syria and Iran, rent has given policy-makers a certain short-term autonomy of economic pressures from the international system or domestic capital. Both have used rent to make arms purchases which would otherwise be economically ruinous. Both have tried to minimize economic constraints on foreign policy autonomy by maximizing their self-sufficiency or diversifying their economic dependencies. But in neither country have elites been able, in the long term, to ignore the requisites of capital accumulation. Where this requires economies to undertake internal restructuring and liberalization, foreign policy must, arguably, accommodate itself to this change. Indeed, some argue that both regimes have been led largely by internal economic crisis to liberalize their economies and that this has required foreign policies be moderated to increase access to resources controlled by the core states or their regional clients. This is the root of the 'pragmatism' which some pundits attribute to the Syrian and Iranian regimes as their once radical elites have been socialized into the inevitability of attending to the requisites of capitalist economic rationality.

One way of incorporating these three models—the 'rational actor', the 'irrational actor' and the 'capital accumulator'—into a single analysis is to take them to represent three underlying *system survival requisites* which potentially shape foreign policy, namely, geopolitically shaped national interests (ambitions) and external threats; domestic politics and internal ideological legitimization needs; and economic needs. In any given regime at any given time, threats to one or the other may be dominant in decision-makers' calculations, although in the long run if any are neglected, regime stability is put at risk.

This is compatible with David's (1991) notion of 'omni-balancing', which seeks to bridge the realist and domestic politics models. Although his analysis tends to stress the domestic roots of foreign policy, he acknowledges that elites in Third World countries must balance *both* internal and external threats, and it logically follows that in regimes where external threats are significant and internal ones manageable, the priorities shaping foreign policy may tilt towards coping with the external arena. The notion of omni-balancing could also be extended by taking rationality to mean attending not only to security threats but also to capital accumulation and

rent acquisition requisites. Since these various requisites of state-formation may conflict in any given situation, and no policy is therefore likely to appear fully rational from all points of view, the highest rationality may be the ability to make a reasonable series of trade-offs. It does not follow, of course, that the attempt to reconcile conflicting priorities will always maximize rationality in practice; elites may often be caught in a way which makes it hard for them to achieve one priority without paying a high cost in another. For example, the Rushdie affair has caught Iranian elites between the need to preserve the domestic legitimacy derived from the Khomeini heritage and the need, for economic reasons, to repair relations with Western Europe which this affair has strained. Similarly, the greater the extent to which both Syria and Iran reintegrate into the world capitalist system, the more they risk aspects of internal legitimacy, including their nationalist foreign policies and the social contract by which the state assumes responsibility for social welfare.

Which rationality receives priority may partly depend on phases in regime development. Thus, new regimes which grow out of radical movements may, in consolidating themselves, give priority to internal legitimacy demands which, in the Middle East, dictate nationalist challenges to global domination of the local system. In the Syrian case, legitimacy, especially for a minority-dominated regime, rests on Arab nationalism, while in Iran it rests on maintenance of an 'anti-Satanic' profile. However, if untempered by realist adaptation to the balance of power, such challenges can inflame external threats and sacrifice the requisites of capital accumulation by damaging international economic links. These costs are likely, over time, to socialize revolutionary or nationalist elites into the rules of the global system and, provided they survive, to give them experience in the art of omni-balancing. Once the state is consolidated and political threats reduced, omni-balancing might well dictate a swing to economic priorities.

The rival foreign policy models, however, not only depict the underlying forces or interests that shape foreign policy, but also imply a certain kind of policy-making process—more or less coherent—in which choices are actually made. Two alternatives are worthy of consideration in relatively consolidated Third World authoritarian regimes, namely, Allison's (1971) rational actor and bureaucratic politics models.

Where, as in Syria, a unified elite has consolidated relative autonomy of society to conduct foreign policy, typically through a power-building formula mixing patrimonial techniques with corporatist or Leninist institution-building, the preferences of the Bonapartist presidential monarchy are decisive. Such an autonomous unitary elite—assumed in realist theory to be needed to rationally balance trade-offs—provides the political base for a rational actor foreign policy.

In regimes such as Iran, where power is less concentrated in a unified elite, the bureaucratic politics model has more relevance. It presumes that many different interests are at stake in the foreign policy process as, indeed, the notion of omni-balancing supposes. But, rather than a unified elite making foreign policy, it is the outcome of struggle by competing elite factions which need the support of—and are thus more constrained by—internal classes and public opinion than in the rational actor model. Some factions may be more concerned with economic needs, others with internal security, yet others with external threats. The outcome may represent less a rational adaptation to some geopolitically defined national interest than a reflection of the internal power balance at a given moment—in other words, the dictates of domestic politics. Foreign policy positions may become weapons in the domestic political struggle. However, the bureaucratic politics model does not insist that the top executive is incapable of arbitrating between factions and thereby attaining the autonomy to omni-balance in pursuit of a rational foreign policy. In the Iranian case, a dominant faction has arguably been able to pursue a largely consistent policy in spite of having to fend off rivals; this was well illustrated during ‘Desert Storm’, when radical demands to join Iraq were turned aside by the dominant pragmatists who went as far as acquiescing in the US intervention.

Whatever the underlying forces and interests, the top leadership is the most immediate determinant of foreign policy decisions. In the personalistic authoritarian regimes of the Third World, the *ideologies* of top leaders are perhaps more decisive than in more institutionalized regimes (Rosenau 1971).⁶ The values of these leaders are, in part, shaped by social background; there is some evidence that radical nationalist ideologies are associated with elites from rural, peripheral, domestically (as opposed to internationally) educated social groups. Second, among the most consistent findings of research is that decision-makers’ *images* of a hostile environment are a strong predictor of their foreign policy (McGowan and Shapiro 1973:53–58). The leaders of regional middle powers in a penetrated system are likely to perceive a zero-sum global arena in which imperialism is the source of most problems and to perceive the mobilization of power as the most workable coping strategy; such beliefs only become irrational if new evidence which contradicts them is consistently rejected.

It is often assumed that irrationality is more likely in closed authoritarian political systems, yet the rational actor model presumes rationality is maximized by leadership autonomy of special interests and public opinion. Given this, the decisive factor in determining rationality may be leadership *experience* (ibid.: 72); while the leaders of unconsolidated radical states may lack this (Iran and Syria after their revolutions), the continuity of leadership typical of *consolidated* authoritarian states like Asad’s Syria

makes for cumulative foreign policy *experience* and thus, conceivably, rationality.

Nevertheless, the leader's perceptions and preferences are not exclusively personal but are likely to be powerfully shaped and filtered through what Holsti (1977) calls a *country's foreign policy role-conception*. This, in turn, is shaped by history and geography, potentially giving a greater consistency to a country's foreign policy than either idiosyncratic or domestic politics models imply. Decisions can be seen as an interaction between role, idiosyncratic factors, the domestic policy process, regime requisites and external systemic constraints, but the relative weight of each will vary by case.

TOWARDS APPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts surveyed above have potential to help understand Syria and Iran's alliance behaviour, their policies in Lebanon and their role in the Middle East peace process.

Alliance theory and the Syrian-Iranian alliance

Alliances, in realist thinking, are shaped by the dictates of balancing, while internal characteristics of states, such as ideology or type of political system, are less relevant. The rational actor puts priority on geopolitically shaped national interests and, since neighbouring states are natural geopolitical rivals, the neighbour (rival) of one's neighbour is a natural ally in balancing threats. In this view, the Syrian-Iranian alliance is a natural balancer of Iraq. Balancing can take more complex forms than this: for Iran the Syrian alliance allowed it to forestall an all-Arab alliance against it. Realist theory, in viewing alliance formation as a response to destabilizing power imbalances, might see the Syrian-Iranian alliance as a factor for regional stability.

Alliances may be shaped by more than the overt balancing (or bandwagoning) dynamics of the state system. Holsti (1982) saw Third World alliances, or more specifically *realignments*, as originating in the effort to break out of excessively asymmetrical *dependency*; arguably, the Syrian-Iranian alliance was an outcome of Iran's attempts to break dependence on its US patron. Jettisoning such dependence, however, leaves states friendless; as such, Iran's Syrian alliance could be seen as the search for an alternative, more symmetrical alignment.

By contrast to realism, domestic politics models might well see the Syrian-Iranian alliance as a rejectionist axis driven by internal instability

and irrational leadership ideology. A less extreme view might see internal politics as an intervening variable between systemic factors and state behaviour. Especially where geopolitical and systemic considerations leave a *choice* of allies, elite ideology and domestic politics may have more impact on alliance formation. Thus, under different leaderships and ideologies, Iran has opted for alternative Israeli and Syrian partnerships. To the extent domestic politics requisites or bureaucratic models of the policy process approximate reality, an alliance which lacks a domestic constituency is very vulnerable.

The durability of the Syrian-Iranian alliance requires some explanation. Yaniv (1987) argues that alignments are highly unstable in the Middle East. In spite of relative cultural homogeneity, federations, alliances, agreements of cooperation and the like are constantly broken and formed in a 'dizzying game'. He attributes this to the exceptional insecurity of the Middle East's 'primitive political system' which produces high mistrust even between allies and a preference for short-term gains at the expense of longer-term cooperation. Yaniv's regional exceptionalism is obviously inadequate to explain the Syrian-Iranian case. According to Snyder (1984), alliances are more likely to be durable if the allies badly need each other, if the strategic benefits are balanced, not lopsided, if the alliance is openly declared and institutionalized rather than tacit, if they have a common enemy and if the allies have a record of being trustworthy in their relations. Many of these factors arguably hold in the Syrian-Iranian relation. But, if Yaniv is right that regional systemic features have tended to produce quite the opposite outcomes, the durability of the alliance suggests that other factors, perhaps leadership rationality and experience, may override such systemic influences.

Alternative models and the Arab-Israeli conflict

Domestic politics models such as Pipes' (1990) interpret the conflict with Israel as indispensable to the Syrian regime. Yet Syria has, against the logical expectations of this model, entered the peace process. A realist/rational actor model would expect Syria to abandon revisionism and seek a settlement (but to attempt to maximize its leverage in the negotiations by balancing Israeli power). While a Kennan-like 'export of revolution' model may be plausible in explaining Iranian attitudes towards Israel, bureaucratic models of conflict between militants and pragmatists are an alternative. Calvert's (1986) 'dramatic actor model' suggests a yet more nuanced possibility: since Iran's core national interests are not at stake but the regime's legitimacy and regional role could be damaged by a peace settlement, the regime may rhetorically oppose the peace process, without actually doing much to obstruct it.

Theory and the case of Lebanon

Lebanon, where state power collapsed under a combination of internal conflict and external forces, manifests the exceptional interaction of global, regional and domestic levels in the Middle East, including penetration of lower levels by higher ones and relatively intense reaction or emulation across state boundaries (Rosenau 1969). Specifically, it shows the tendency of external intervention by hegemonic powers (Israel, USA) to stimulate popular (Shi'ite) revisionist movements at the substate level. The alliance between Shi'ite clergy in Iran and Lebanon illustrates the exceptional tendency for such movements in the Middle East to take transnational form. Finally, it shows how such movements are backed by regional states seeking to curb extra-regional intervention.

The Syrian-Iranian-Lebanese Shi'ite connection could be seen as a revisionist challenge to the state system. Hizbollah, on the face of it, is a destabilizing factor in southern Lebanon. There is, however, evidence that Hizbollah's objectives have come to be quite limited, namely, forcing an Israeli evacuation from south Lebanon. To be sure, Iran's role in south Lebanon may have initially been a product of revisionism, but it has increasingly been subordinated to Syrian interests there. The role of Syria in Lebanon can perhaps more plausibly be interpreted in terms of the realist model—that is, the attempt to balance Israeli power and create a sphere of influence.

CONCLUSION

The starting-point of the study is the hypothesis that Syrian and Iranian foreign policy and their alliance must be understood:

- 1 as a reaction and continuing adaptation to a regional arena characterized by a) extraordinary penetration by the hegemonic powers of the global system; b) extraordinary levels of insecurity and threat from intense conflict and war; c) exceptionally powerful transstate forces which present an opportunity for regional middle powers to generate power beyond their state borders.
- 2 as an outcome of foreign policy-making processes which, far from being irrational functions of domestic politics, reflect some balance between the conflicting requisites of *raison d'état*, the maintenance of internal legitimacy, and economic health. The particular balance is reached in a policy process which features some combination of bureaucratic politics and the preferences of a leadership enjoying relative autonomy.

NOTES

- 1 This category is similar to what Iver B. Neumann *et al.*, *Regional Great Powers in International Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), call regional great powers; we adopt their view of most of the defining features of such states but prefer not to attribute such an elevated status to states which, in the global context, are distinctly constrained by true great powers.
- 2 There is plenty of empirical cross-national evidence that reactions to other states are the strongest determinants of foreign policy: aggression expressed is correlated with aggression received, defence expenditures rise with international tensions, the efforts of some nations to gain supremacy provoke anti-hegemonic balancing, etc. Studies have concluded that interstate conflict was associated more with variations in international situation than in domestic situation. On the other hand, belligerent foreign policy does correlate with national attributes defining a state's place in the international arena, such as its relative military power, size, level of nationalism and dissimilarity to other states. See the survey on cross-national studies in Patrick McGowan and Howard Shapiro, *The Comparative Study of Foreign Policy: A Survey of Scientific Findings* (Beverly Hills, Calif. and London: Sage Publications, 1973, pp. 75–124).
- 3 For an application of Huntington's (Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968) praetorian model to the Middle East, see Amos Perlmutter, *Egypt: The Praetorian State* (Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1974). The neo-patrimonial model, first articulated by S.N. Eisenstadt, has been widely applied to the Middle East. See Shahrough Akhavi, 'Egypt: Neo-Patrimonial Elite', in Frank Tachau (ed.), *Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East* (New York: John Wiley, 1975, pp. 69–113).
 In so far as dependency theory assumes Third World elites are clients of the world capitalist core, they could not be expected to preside over a state that would defend some notion of a national interest. For a study of dependency and foreign policy, see, e.g., Bruce Moon, 'The Foreign Policy of the Dependent State' (*International Studies Quarterly* 1983, V. 27, September, pp. 315–340). Dependency is used to explain anti-nationalist foreign policies in Sami Farsoun and William Carroll, 'State Capitalism and Counterrevolution in the Middle East: A Thesis', in Barbara Caplan (ed.), *Social Change in the Capitalist World Economy* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1978).
- 4 The prototypical conceptualization of the Bonapartist state is Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishing Co., 1898). In analyses of the Third World inspired by this view, the state's autonomy rests on the bureaucratic apparatus, the decline of a formerly dominant class, the lack of consolidation of a new dominant class and the state's mobilization of plebeian elements on its side. The idea of relative autonomy in Marxist analysis is developed in Nicos Poulantzas, *L'Etat, le pouvoir, le socialisme* (Paris: PUF, 1977).
- 5 Several studies have recognized that Third World states are not adequately conceptualized by dichotomization and that some are strong and relatively autonomous. See Ellen Kay Trimburger, *Revolution From Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). For the Middle East, see Adeed Dawisha and I. William Zartman (eds), *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab*

State (London and New York: Croom Helm, 1988). In the Latin American case, see Douglas Chalmers, 'The Politicized State in Latin America', in James Malloy (ed.), *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977). On the possibilities of participation in non-democratic regimes, see Joan Nelson, 'Political Participation', in Myron Weiner and Samuel P. Huntington (eds), *Understanding Political Development* (Boston: Little Brown, 1987).

- 6 Rosenau (1971) suggested that in smaller, less developed countries with closed polities, the personal leadership factor would rank first in explaining foreign policy, and systemic ones second, since small states were highly vulnerable to external power. Domestic politics factors such as regime type would count for less and societal impact the least.

3 The foreign policy of Iran

The Iranian state, once the plaything of rival foreign forces, was transformed under the Shah into a significant power, albeit one frequently acting as a surrogate for Western interests. Since the Islamic revolution, Iran's power assets have been deployed in defence of regional autonomy from the West. Iran is now playing the more assertive role expected of a regional middle power in the Middle East.

THE DURABLE DETERMINANTS OF IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

For centuries geography has played a key part in informing Iran's foreign policy. Historically a landmass empire, the modern state's regional ambitions extend to much of West Asia. Geography has acted as a single force with two countervailing tendencies. On the one hand, geography has facilitated the spread of Persian influence in Asia, and on the other it has exposed Iran to great power rivalries and diplomatic machinations of out-of-area states. Iran's historical impotence in the face of foreign influence has left a deep, and seemingly permanent, scar on the Iranian psyche which has also been guiding elite thinking for many decades.

Historically, the same fears and perceptions have formed the basis of Iranian nationalism (Cottam 1979). Iranian nationalism has for generations been intertwined with the issue of ensuring Iran's territorial integrity. A combination of geography, the need to secure the country's territorial integrity, adverse historical experiences, competition with other empires (such as the Ottoman empire), and meddling in Iran's internal affairs by Western powers such as Russia, Britain and the USA, along with the country's resource endowment, have combined to give geopolitics a special place in determining Iranian foreign policy (Saikal 1980). Geopolitics has had, and continues to have, a special place in Iran's role-conception, and as such must be given a special place in any analysis of Iranian foreign policy.

For decades its geography has meant that the country was never too far from the centre of international political developments. During the Second World War Iran was a vital link in the transfer of supplies to the Soviet Union (Ghods 1989). Even the value of the country as a major geostrategic factor in the war carried a cost for the Iranians. As a strategically placed country, it not only faced occupation by the Allied powers but its king (Reza Shah) was forcibly retired by the Allies because of his pro-Nazi sympathies.

With the Pahlavis, the fear was that outside powers would conspire to undermine the rebirth of the powerful state under their rule, and with the Islamic Republicans it has been argued that outside, 'Satanic' powers, have, since 1979, been trying to defeat Iran's unique Islamic revolution. These perceptions and historical fears were partly responsible for the evolution of the 'negative balance' doctrine (Ramazani 1975) that formed the basis of Iran's pre- and post-revolution foreign policy. The same views have also informed the fierce struggle for (both political and economic) independence (*esteqlal*) in Iranians from foreign powers. Thus, one of the main battle cries of the revolutionaries in 1978–1979 was '*Azadi, Esteqlal: Jomhuri Eslami*' (Freedom, Independence: Islamic Republic), implying that freedom and independence were closely related variables. Thus, the attainment of full sovereignty and control has for many decades been a popular sentiment and at the same time an elite concern.

Another, equally significant, revolutionary slogan was '*Khod kafa-ye*' (Self-sufficiency), referring to the country's deep desire to reduce its economic dependence on Western powers and outside economic forces. Both Left and Right have argued for many years that it is economic independence that will deliver political independence and not vice versa.

The drive towards regional supremacy has been the other feature of Iranian foreign policy. Derived from Iran's long history and its geography, Iran sees itself as uniquely qualified to determine, at the very least, the destiny of the Persian Gulf sub-region. Furthermore, it sees itself as one of only a handful of 'natural' states in the Middle East which, by virtue of being an old and territorially established civilization (based around the notion of '*Iranzamin*'), can and should have influence beyond its borders. Mohammad Reza Shah's long reign is full of evidence of this tendency in Iranian elite thinking after 1953, particularly so in the 1970s (Amirsadeghi 1981). Throughout the latter decade Iran strived to become the Gulf region's premier military power and the main pillar of the Western security system in the Middle East. To resume, as the Shah himself put, Iran's 'historic responsibilities' (Chubin and Zabih 1974:214). As part of this regional profile Iran occupied the three strategic Abu Musa and Tunb islands in the Persian Gulf, intervened militarily in Oman to secure the Sultan's authority

and forged an alliance with the Iraqi Kurds in order to pressurize Baghdad into negotiations over the Shatt al-Arab waterway.

Iran's membership of regional organizations which were designed to help contain the feared Soviet expansion southwards illustrate the country's significance as a geographic asset. Iran was a founding member of the Baghdad Pact and acquired a key role in its successor, the US-created Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Indeed, from this period on, we note the emergence of another key feature of Iranian foreign policy: its attempts to form alliances with its non-Arab neighbours, namely, Pakistan and Turkey. The Islamic Republic's relations with these Muslim countries, incidentally, has remained more or less as close (though at times uneasy) as it had been during the Shah's reign (Kapur 1990; Borovali 1990), despite the fact that both Pakistan and Turkey have been very close allies of the United States and despite Tehran's antagonisms towards other Muslim countries with alliances with the USA, such as Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, since the early 1950s Iran has been able to cultivate close ties with at least one Arab state in the region. In the 1960s, and in the face of expanding Egyptian influence in the Arab world and the march of Arab nationalism, Iran managed to keep close to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In the 1970s, in addition to a host of Arab friends, it was Sadat's Egypt that was courted by Tehran. Since the revolution, of course, Tehran has concentrated its efforts on securing and consolidating its newly found alliance with Syria. Indeed, Iran's relations with Arab states can be seen as a good indicator of its overall foreign policy orientation: when Iran functioned as a member of the Western alliance in the Middle East it found itself in bed with the pro-Western Arab states. When it left the Western alliance structures in 1979, however, it not only severed its ties with many of its former Arab friends but sought closer contact with a number of the radical Arab regimes, Libya and Syria in particular.

Since 1979, where geopolitics has mattered, it has also acquired a religious dimension, the latter acting as a new layer over the deeply felt territorial nationalism of the state. Apart from the more obvious Shi'i-Sunni differences that Iran's Shi'i-led revolution and post-Shah regime highlighted, Islamic issues have emerged to affect Iran's regional profile and its policies towards many of its neighbours. Iran's post-revolution pasture has also been affected by what we would like to call the geopolitics of Islam. In the first instance, Tehran's Messianic Shi'ism of the early 1980s posed a direct challenge to the regional *status quo* and the integrity of Iran's Arab neighbours. At the same time, Iran's stand *vis-à-vis* the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and Moscow's treatment of its own Muslim population added a new religious dimension to the Cold War-based Iranian-Soviet relations (Fuller 1991). Additionally, support for Islamist movements in Afghanistan and elsewhere

in the Middle East became a permanent fixture of Iranian foreign policy in its interstate and substate interactions in the 1980s.

In making explicit its demand to speak in the name of Islam, Tehran's revolutionary leaders caused noticeable tensions in the country's relations with Saudi Arabia and other influential Islamic actors in the Muslim world, among whom can be counted the al-Azhar establishment in Egypt and the Sunni establishments of Pakistan and Malaysia. But, by the same token, Iranian Islamic revolutionaries also managed to accumulate a great deal of support and sympathy from other Islamist movements, whether these happened to be in the Philippines, sub-Saharan Africa or nearer to home in Iraq and Lebanon. Indeed, to gauge the influence of religion in Iran's regional policy planning one only needs to note that the majority of revolutionary/liberation movements receiving Iranian support in the 1980s were Shi'i organizations opposing either the rulers of Iraq and the other Gulf Arab states or being active in the Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Ehteshami 1995).

In the 1990s, although Iran has been pursuing a more integrationalist foreign policy, none the less it has tried to keep pace with the rise of politicized Islamic groups in the Arab world and has been active in showing support for the following movements: the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, the National Islamic Movement in Sudan, HAMAS and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, the al-Nahda Party in Tunisia, and the Jihad group in Egypt. Further afield, Tehran has been quite content to allow itself to be portrayed as a supporter of Islamist movements of all denominations. The support given to the Islamic MORO movement in the Philippines in the 1980s and to the Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s are good examples of this Iranian strategy.

To recap, Iran's overt use of Islam, or at least Islamic symbols, in its role-conception and in its formulation of policy-making machinery and strategic aims caused serious rifts in—and continues to complicate—Tehran's relations with the Sunni-dominated, largely secular-led Arab world. Iran's Islamic revolution and the Iranian leadership's call for Islamic uprisings found sympathetic ears in many Arab and Muslim societies, again reinforcing Arab suspicions of Iranian intentions, but also affording Tehran new ways of influencing developments in the region. The net result of the 'Islamization' of Iran's foreign policy, thus, has been twofold: to complicate the geopolitical factors influencing the Iranian state and to raise the importance of such factors for regional stability and calculations of Iran's neighbours. Interestingly, Iran's definition of its regional presence in Islamic, and explicitly Shi'i, terms after the revolution has caused some profound changes in the role-conception of Iran's neighbours and regional competitors. Such role changes have ranged from Saudi Arabia's reiteration

of its centrality to Islam, to Israel's portrayal of itself as the West's first line of defence against the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

THE POLICY PROCESS

For much of the 1980s, with the Iran-Iraq war as strategic backdrop, foreign policy issues were addressed by Ayatollah Khomeini himself, and at key junctures it was his office that made and implemented policy. But various factions and centres of power within the clerical establishment took advantage of many opportunities to advance their own interests and to implement their own foreign agendas. This was particularly visible in relation to the Arab world. The radicals (or *Maktabis*) were constantly seeking the vehicles for exporting the Islamic revolution and concluding alliances with Islamist movements in the region. To this end, in the early 1980s the radical groups cultivated such movements in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and, of course, Lebanon, amongst other places. In the first decade of the republic the struggle between the so-called moderates or pragmatists and the radicals was a determinant element of the policy process. Factionalism and institutional competition were rife and constitute an important feature of the post-revolution Iranian political system. The factions themselves are rather fluid and, as they are normally comprised of a variety of tendencies and blocs built around powerful personalities, they tend to act as fronts and as such do not always function as a single entity.

So, in the 1980s, the presence of such personalities as Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri and Hojjatoleslams Mehdi Karrubi, Sadeq Khalkhali, Mohammad Khojinia and Ali Akbar Mohtashemi (former Iranian ambassador to Syria and a key figure in developing Iranian-Syrian ties and Tehran's influence in Lebanon) ensured that the radical agenda would dominate, the 'Irangate' deals with Israel and the USA notwithstanding. By way of an illustration, it has been claimed that under Mohtashemi

the Iranian Embassy in Damascus [had become] the nerve centre of Tehran's campaign to export the Ayatollah's revolution... The Syrians had given him virtual *carte blanche* in the use of his diplomatic privileges ... The Damascus Embassy also enjoyed the biggest budget ever allocated to any Iranian mission abroad,

(Taheri 1987:126)

perhaps as much as US\$400 million per year during this period, and a staff of about 200. Since 1990, of course, the position of individuals such as Mohtashemi has been gradually weakening, so much so that in February 1995 Mohtashemi's publication, *Jahan-e Islami*, was banned by the regime

and only months later (in August) the Teachers' Training University's guards were able to prevent him from delivering a well-publicized speech to the university's students (*Kayah Hava'i* 23 August 1995).

With the rise of Ayatollahs Khamenei, Mohammad Yazdi and President Rafsanjani, the radical/populist factions have experienced a decline in their political fortunes, but several influential individuals, like Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, have continued to object to many of President Rafsanjani's initiatives and to fan the ashes of populism. These three personalities have been instrumental in the formulation of the republic's new priorities. The Faqih, Ayatollah Khamenei, has been a close ally of Rafsanjani since 1988 and a supporter of many of his administration's policies. Ayatollah Khamenei is an opponent of the radical factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) but is himself a 'traditionalist' in Iranian political terms, favouring a reasonable distance between Iran and the West and opposing 'Westernization' of Iranian society (see Bakhash 1995). To prevent 'corruption' of Muslim Iran, he frequently speaks against foreign investment in Iran and against measures that might facilitate a cultural invasion of the country by the US-led Western powers. Such perceptions do have an impact on Tehran's foreign policy but not enough to dislodge or derail President Rafsanjani's foreign policy orientation. The President is the key foreign policy-maker. He has favoured Iran's integration in the international system and is supportive of efforts to improve the country's relations with the outside world; his cabinet and presidential staff are there to facilitate this.

Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, the Head of the Judiciary, has been another important ally of the Rafsanjani administration, and of the new Faqih. As a leading conservative, he has supported many of President Rafsanjani's economic policies and has been vocal in his opposition to the radical forces. He has been instrumental in boosting Ayatollah Khamenei's politico-religious standing since the early 1990s as well, never ceasing to remind the faithful and the clergy that Ayatollah Khamenei, as the Faqih, should receive unquestioning obedience. In foreign policy terms, although Ayatollah Yazdi has adopted a hard-line position on the Arab-Israeli peace process and over relations with the USA, he is a supporter of the thrust of Iran's pragmatist strategy.

Despite their differences (largely over personalities in official positions and appointing of their own allies to key government posts) and a certain degree of institutional competition between their offices, since August 1989 the President and the Faqih have managed to work closely enough to ensure the isolation of the radicals in regional, national and institutional power centres. This deliberate process of marginalization had in turn resulted in the decline of the radical elements' influence over foreign policy. But this struggle has neither eliminated the radicals altogether (Mohtashemi,

for example, re-entered public life in mid-1994 to head an Islamic bureau) nor indeed ended factionalist tendencies in the republic.

In fact, no sooner had the radicals been marginalized than another caucus emerged to block the pragmatists. This time, the opposing faction, dubbed the 'traditionalists', gave almost unreserved support to Rafsanjani's economic reform policies but adopted a strong line on the state's liberalization of social policy. On foreign policy, the traditionalists reserved judgement on the administration's efforts to rebuild bridges with the West, and remained suspicious of moves that would undermine the influence of the clergy and of Islam in society; they were not, however, prepared to support the call of the radical forces for a return to the policies of the 1980s.

Since August 1989 and the constitutional reforms of that year, a 'presidential centre' has been created at the heart of the executive power structure of the republic. But this institutional change has not ended intra-elite power politics in the system, which in turn has allowed the growth of a number of 'consultation circles' at various levels of decision-making. In the absence of political party structures, traditionally, factions have capitalized on such circles to influence policy. The highest of such circles have, through distilling the positions and interests of various factions, been able to limit the impact of factional rivalries on the system and have thus helped to check the corroding effect of these rivalries. Paradoxically, though, the existence of the same has tended to sharpen factional politics in the republic. Furthermore, the absence of ruling political party structures and the existence of both informal and policy-based consultative circles have tended to encourage elite factionalism and competition over policy-making.

Of course, the size and membership structure of such consultation circles has varied and fluctuated in accordance with the overall position of factions in the republican power elite. Whereas, in the 1980s, the radical elements tended to dominate the most important of such bodies and policy fora, not surprisingly since 1989 the pragmatists have enjoyed full control of such circles. To put their influence in perspective, it was one such consultation circle, for example, that advised Ayatollah Khomeini to accept SCR 598 and a cease-fire in the war with Iraq.

The constitutional reforms also brought into being a National Security Council (NSC), controlled by the President and his staff. This body has become the nerve centre of policy-making in Iran and, as such, is the key body where foreign policy is debated. The President, thus, has since 1989 taken full charge of foreign policy-making and has been allowed to use his new powers to formulate and direct Iran's international relations. Under the reformed constitution the Foreign Minister reports directly to the President who heads the Council of Ministers. Thus, implementation of foreign policy initiatives through the Foreign Ministry is also monitored through

the President's Office. While the legislature is constitutionally barred from interfering in the executive's foreign policy-making process, the Majlis does discuss foreign policy issues and its members are often heard making pronouncements on regional and international matters. Furthermore, they do try and influence the direction of foreign policy through the power of the Majlis' own committees and not infrequent contacts with foreign dignitaries. Indeed, the institutional ties between the Majlis and the executive are so intimate that Hojjatolislam Hassan Rouhani, the Deputy Majlis Speaker, has been serving as the secretary of the NSC and as Ayatollah Khamenei's representative on that body.

So, although since 1989 the presidential office has emerged as the main foreign policy-making organ of the state, the President's foreign policy decisions are not made in isolation of other power centres. In this regard the role of the Faqih, the Majlis and the Council of Guardians are all extremely important in the Iranian foreign policy-making process. The Faqih is the individual whose support is crucial in implementation of foreign policy decisions. The Faqih's position and support is normally arrived at at the formulation stage of policies: through his personal representative on the NSC he follows and conveys his views to this decision-making body. When controversial decisions have to be made, therefore, the fact that the Faqih has been involved, albeit indirectly, in the policy formulation means that he can and does make public statements in endorsement of decisions, thus providing justification for the President's foreign policy initiatives and diffusing direct criticism of his administration.

As already mentioned, the Majlis too can play an active part in the foreign policy thinking. The floor of the Majlis and the Majlis' Foreign Affairs Committee are the usual avenues for the deputies' pronouncements on foreign policy decisions. Majlis deputies have the power to seek clarification from ministers and detailed written responses relating to domestic and foreign policies of the executive body, and through these mechanisms the deputies can influence foreign policy decisions, whether in favour of restoration of relations with the USA or in opposing initiatives that strive to improve relations with the Western countries and their regional allies. The Majlis can monitor foreign policy developments through other avenues as well—the government is required to obtain the Majlis' approval for entering into any 'international treaties, memorandums of understanding, contracts and agreements' with other states and parties. This constitutional clause gives the Majlis the authority to vet the administration's overseas initiatives.

The tribune of the Majlis offers the deputies a unique opportunity to influence public opinion and challenge presidential initiatives and policies. Furthermore, deputies have the power and ability to manipulate and influence

public opinion, itself an important factor in the foreign policymaking process, through their speeches, interviews and writings in the national press. Although it may not always pay off, influencing public opinion is the traditional method of putting pressure on the executive to revise or continue to pursue a particular policy, and this partly explains the remarkably open nature of political debate in Iran.

The place of the Council of Guardians in foreign policy-making is not as direct as that of the Majlis. The Council of Guardian's formal role in this context is to ensure that the administration's foreign policy initiatives do not contravene the constitution. Where the Council of Guardians does make judgements these are mainly of a technical nature and largely deal with the republic's bilateral agreements with other countries.

The Foreign Ministry's role in the policy process and role of the Foreign Minister must not be ignored, however. The Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, is the world's longest-serving Foreign Minister and the Iranian cabinet's longest-serving member, having been a member of the government since December 1981. His presence has assured continuity in the policy implementation process. Over the years he has been able to place pragmatists in key ministry positions and, by keeping close ties to both President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khamenei, he has managed to reserve himself a place at the highest echelons of power. From 1993 until August 1995, when Mehdi Hashemi, the President's brother (who replaced Hamid Mirzadeh as Vice-President for executive affairs in that month), acted as senior Deputy Foreign Minister, Dr Velayati managed to strengthen the pragmatists' grip on the ministry. Soon after the April 1992 parliamentary elections, for example, he retired 16 ambassadors with known connections to the radical factions (Calabrese 1994). His power in the ministry, however, is not unlimited, nor does it remain unchecked. Particularly at times of crisis, covert operations and with regard to key ambassadorial appointments (like that of the Iranian ambassador to Syria) he has to bow to others (usually clerical elements) in the system and prove responsive to factional demands.

ECONOMIC BASES OF POWER AND CONSTRAINTS

For the Iranian elite, pre- and post-revolution, economic power and independence have been seen as the precursors to political independence and regional influence. Despite this desire, for the first half of the twentieth century Iran was in not too insubstantial receipt of foreign economic and military aid, largely from the USA. The situation was to change in the second half of the 1960s, when Iran begun to accumulate capital from the oil rent at a higher rate and an accelerated pace and developed an awareness

of its economic potential, a learning process that was to reach its zenith in the 1970s with the oil price rises of that decade. The Shah's ambition of making Iran the 'fifth greatest power on earth' reflected the importance of a sound economic base to the desires of Iran's political masters. Apparently, oil wealth was to magically transform Iran into a great regional military and global economic power. The emphasis during this period was on the rapid expansion of the domestic economy and the broadening of the country's industrial and manufacturing base through an intensive import substitution industrialization strategy. Foreign capital and expertise were viewed as necessary evils for the realization of this mission.

The mad rush of the 1970s to modernize society and industrialize the economy took its toll, however, not least on the architect of the 'aggrandizement' strategy itself, the Shah. But this high-risk strategy also increased Iran's dependence on its hydrocarbon resources, and over a very short period of time the economics and politics of oil began to infiltrate the foreign policy and security strategy of the country.

Thus, over time, oil evolved as the main solution not only to Iran's economic ills, but also for the re-establishment of its political supremacy in the region. At the same time, this heavy reliance on oil wealth as the main pillar of Iran's grand strategy increased the country's vulnerability to outside forces and international economic pressures beyond its control, and in so doing also increased the country's dependence on the outside world and the key Western powers like the USA. Oil wealth, in short, had become both the salvation and the curse for the country's modernizing elites; its Achilles' heel.

The Islamic Republic inherited the peculiarities of Iran's oil-based socio-economic system and its oil-related place in the international economic division of labour. While, in the first few years after the revolution, the new elite did try to tinker with Iran's domestic, regional and international profile, the war with Iraq effectively put a stop to any opportunities to redirect the economy away from its heavy reliance on oil wealth and thus ended any prospects of Iran changing its relationship with the international capitalist system. Iran's inability to leave the system or change its own position within it meant that eventually the theocracy too would have to behave according to the rules set by the Pahlavi regime—and, more to the point, the international capitalist system. Thus, Iran's place in the New International Division of Labour (NIDL) as a supplier of hydrocarbons did not change, but what did change was Iran's place in the system as a potential NIC. The revolution and Iran's post-revolution international posture effectively ended its post-1945 alliances and froze the national capital-foreign capital ties that had been emerging since the late 1960s. The net effect of these developments was twofold. On the one hand, the interdependencies that

were created by developments in the oil industry in the 1970s between Iran's *rentier* economy and international capitalism remained intact but, on the other hand, Iran's aspirations to become an NIC in the NIDL were checked.

Sooner rather than later the reintegration of the Iranian economy into the international system was to leave its mark on Iran's foreign policy, even though under Ayatollah Khomeini's regime Iran had acquired a large degree of freedom in its foreign policy-making and in exerting its influence in the region. The freedom to act 'independently' of outside powers, of course, had been one of the main aims of the revolution, but in regard to policymaking this newly cherished freedom was reinforced by the clerics' domination of the long-autonomous Iranian state, founded as it had been on its monopoly of income from the country's hydrocarbon resources.

By the late 1980s the same priorities that had preoccupied the Shah's last decade had re-emerged to dominate the economic and political agenda of Iran's post-Khomeini leadership, despite the fact that the post-revolution political elite had managed to free itself of direct outside interference in Iran's domestic affairs and to behave much more independently of outside powers and pressures.

The major impact on Iranian foreign policy of its economic policies in many ways resembles developments in Algeria where, as Korany (1991) demonstrates, the increasing role of oil in the economy caused an 'economization of foreign policy'. In post-Khomeini Iran this tendency is even more marked than before: 'oil revenues are being used to spur economic growth and military strength, which will in turn be used to ensure a leading role for the Islamic Republic within OPEC and in regional security matters' (Amirahmadi 1994:112).

Moreover, as will be discussed below, the post-1990 changes in Iran's geopolitical environment and systemic changes since the end of the Cold War have merely reinforced the oil-weighted tendency in strategic thinking and the primacy of economics in Iranian foreign policy-making. This, however, does not mean that ideology and strategic ambitions have been completely displaced. Iran's leaders have asserted on more than one occasion that the republic's strategic ambitions cannot be realized without the country's economic renewal—a weak economic base in the New World Order has increasingly been viewed by Iranian leaders as a recipe for peripheralization.

The lasting impression of post-1945 Iranian foreign policy must be that oil has enhanced the country's capabilities and its potential to influence developments around it. Furthermore, global dependence on this commodity gave the Pahlavi political elite opportunities to forge close alliances with outside powers and enabled it to build a substantial military capability in the 1970s and pursue with impunity ambitious political objectives in the

Middle East and beyond. But, the same commodity also imposed many restrictions on the freedom of the state and made it more dependent on oil rent and on outside forces and much more vulnerable to systemic changes. The more it relied on hydrocarbons to free itself from poverty and lack of control over the country's destiny and its desperate inability to influence developments in the regional and international systems, the more it became vulnerable to pressures outside of its control and ultimately the more economic considerations began dominating its foreign policy. So, while Iran has been able to mobilize domestic resources in the service of its foreign policy, the heavy reliance on hydrocarbons has influenced developments, and the evolution of Iranian domestic and foreign policies in ways not altogether expected by the elite.

Although much emphasis in recent decades has been put on Iran's hydrocarbon resources, it should be remembered that the country is one of the richest in the region in terms of solid mineral deposits as well. Although its oil wealth may last for another 100 years or so, it is the exploitation of such nationally plentiful resources as natural gas, iron ore, copper, barite, manganese, zinc, chromium, lead and coal that will facilitate economic development and will drive the economy long after the oil has gone. The country is also rich in arable land (second only to Turkey in terms of area under cultivation) and is blessed with fertile soil in the north and the west. After Turkey, Iran has the largest number of tractors in use in the entire region. Husbandry too provides much food for the country and counts as a substantial national asset; Iran is one of West Asia's largest holders of sheep, chickens and goats. This aside, it is fair to say that, although in terms of resources Iran is a very rich country, for the foreseeable future it is hydrocarbons that will be determining Iran's place and role in the international economic system, and it is the exploitation and sale of oil at a reasonably high price that will be providing the basis for much of foreign policy thinking in Tehran. After all, oil remains the only sector which can underwrite the future economic prosperity of the country.

From boom to bust

In spite of the substantial oil wealth of the 1970s, the Iranian economy entered a period of grave crisis in the second half of the decade, which was compounded by the revolutionary turmoil of the same period. The revolution and the Iran-Iraq war merely worsened the economic crisis and added new dimensions to it; capital and personnel flight, reduction in access to Western technologies and spare parts, and sheer destruction of the industrial base of the country resulted in inflation, high unemployment, an expanded state sector which co-existed alongside an unproductive war-oriented economy,

and greater dependence on hydrocarbons income. So, not only were the economic ills of the late 1970s not overcome as Iran entered the 1980s, but new problems arising out of the revolutionary period and war weakened the economic base of the country even further. By the time the oil price collapsed (in 1986) the Iranian economy was already grinding to a halt; the oil price collapse merely accelerated the rate of decline. The war, moreover, compounded by factional competition and the Moussavi government's statist tendencies, prevented the emergence of alternative policy prescriptions at the policy-making level.

The oil-price-induced economic problems, though, did help in underlining the threat that the continuation of the war was posing to the regime. The magnitude of the crisis only surfaced, however, once the war was brought to an end. Some ten years after the revolution the need for economic reconstruction reintroduced the question of economic strategy and reopened the debate over the question of the republic's socio-economic philosophy. The nature of the economic difficulties and the depth of the crisis were such that the more forward-looking factions within the elite could see that a complete overhaul of the economy was the only option. To give but one example of the economic difficulties faced by the regime it is sufficient to reflect on the economy's foreign currency crisis: after 1988 the demand for the US dollar went up considerably, but due to foreign currency shortages caused by capital flight since the revolution, maturity of many capital projects and their increased demand for foreign currency for spare parts and other inputs, desperate foreign currency needs of existing plants to import spare parts etc., the need to use foreign currency to replace worn out and outdated machinery and, finally, devaluation of the dollar (currency in which Iran receives its oil income) against the Deutschmark and the yen (currencies which Iran needed for much of its industrial imports), Iran had to spend much more of its scarce foreign exchange reserves on activities that would barely allow it in economic terms to stand still. Years of neglect and the prospects of peace had generated such powerful economic pressures that anticipation of future prosperity was threatening to bankrupt the economy.

Thus in 1989, when Rafsanjani became Iran's first executive president, a comprehensive programme of economic liberalization was introduced—against the thrust of the revolutionary period, it has to be said (Hosseini 1994). The aim of the economic reform strategy was twofold: to provide economic reconstruction and recovery and channel the private sector's substantial resources into productive activity, and to reduce the state's role in the economy and thus prevent complete bankruptcy of the regime.

Not unexpectedly, these reforms did not produce immediate results, and a combination of factors led to the further weakening of the economy

in the early and mid-1990s. Of the internal factors, government's deregulation of trade and banking during the first few years of the First Five-year Plan (1989/90–1993/4) caused the biggest problems; huge import bills of around US\$20 billion were recorded during 1990 and 1992 as the government relaxed import regulations and allowed the banking sector to underwrite imports. High imports, coupled with the drop in oil prices from 1992 onwards, ushered in the republic's own international debt crisis.

Externally, while the price of oil did rise in response to the Kuwait crisis of 1990, it soon dropped back to under US\$20 per barrel and by 1991 was trading at around the US\$15 per barrel mark. As Table 2 illustrates, this 'oil shock' had an immediate impact on the Iranian economy. First, it disrupted the government's recovery plans and forecasts for the First Five-year Plan. Second, the oil price crisis caused a rapid cutback in imports, many of which were industrial inputs essential for the recovery and expansion of

Table 2 The Iranian economy, 1990–1994

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
GDP (US \$bn)	52.4	50.1	66.5	75.6	72.9
GDP/capita (US \$)	960	897	1170	1180	1110
GDP growth rate (%)	11.7	11.4	5.7	1.8	2.0
Annual inflation rate (%)	7.6	17.1	22.9	29.1	35.0
Oil price (US \$)	22.3	18.7	18.4	16.3	15.3
Oil production (mn bpd)	3.13	3.43	3.44	3.66	3.58
Oil export revenues (US \$bn)	14.9	16.5	13.5	14.7	13.5
Exports (US \$bn)	19.3	18.7	19.9	18.1	17.0
Imports (US \$bn)	18.3	25.2	23.3	19.3	12.0
Official exchange rate (rial/US \$)	65.31	65.49	67.59	1,759	1,736
Black market rates (rial/US \$)	1,000	1,450	1,450	2,100	2,800
Foreign debt (US \$bn)	9.0	11.3	12.9	20.1	19.2
Current account (US \$bn)	0.33	-9.5	-6.5	-3.8	2.0

Sources: *Compiled from the Iran Statistical Yearbook (various years); Middle East Monitor, October 1995; the Economist Intelligence Unit's quarterly reports on Iran.*

industry. Third, it forced the government to reduce subsidies for basic goods and services at a much faster rate than anticipated. Fourth, it turned Iran into a net debtor country for the first time in many decades; its debt of around US\$30 billion in 1995 made Iran one of the region's biggest debtors. Additionally, as much of the foreign debt has been in short- and medium-term credit, Iran has faced some difficulties in negotiating low interest rates with its creditors. Fifth, the crisis adversely affected the government's rearmament drive and forced it to trim many of its programmes.

The official and subsequent market-generated devaluation of the Iranian rial in 1993, 1994 and 1995 caused almost a 70 per cent reduction in the

value of the rial against the US dollar (in just a few months in 1995, between March and May, the rial dropped from 1,750 to 7,000 against the dollar) and other major currencies and helped to destabilize and weaken the economy even further, causing severe hardship for the majority of the population and acceleration of the inflation rate. The true dimensions of the economic difficulties faced by the regime can be gleaned from its oil income; Iran's hydrocarbons income in 1978 was US\$24 billion (and US\$19.2 billion in 1982 and 1983) (OPEC 1989), whereas in 1993 the figure did not exceed US\$15 billion, about one-quarter of its late 1970s income if one deflates prices and the value of the US dollar over this period.

Considering the devaluation of the rial (thus making imports much more expensive) and Iran's population to national income ratio (35 million people in the late 1970s compared to over 65 million in 1996), one is left in no doubt that, not only is Iran a much poorer country now than it was in the 1970s, but its ability to cope with its immediate economic needs and essential development plans has been much reduced since the revolution, thus increasing the country's reliance on external capital and expertise and, indeed, making the entire economy more vulnerable to external pressures and developments.

With the above in mind, it was not surprising that the political upshot of the oil-price-induced economic crisis of the early 1990s was the reiteration of the need to behave non-ideologically and to seek cooperation with Iran's neighbours (particularly the oil exporters of the Persian Gulf) and trading partners (mainly the European Union and Japan). The latter, resisting the Clinton administration's 'dual containment' strategy, chose to reschedule some of Iran's debt and thus used Iran's economic weakness to acquire more political leverage—albeit for business considerations—with Tehran.

FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIES OF THE 1980s

After the revolution, Iran changed overnight from being a *status quo* regional actor to a revolutionary and disruptive player in the Middle East, challenging in practice and example the legitimacy of practically all of its Arab neighbours—many of whom were the West's oil-producer allies. But it was not until 1980 that a coherent foreign policy outlook began to emerge from Tehran's corridors of power. Although factional infighting among members of the 'liberal'-Islamic revolutionary coalition, which continued until mid-1981, prevented the emergence of a recognizable set of policies and foreign policy objectives for the Islamic state, none the less the outline of a set of principles to be pursued by the regime was increasingly in evidence. Chief among these was the desire for neutrality and maintenance of distance from international and global power bloc alliances. This deeply felt sentiment was encapsulated in

the slogan 'Neither East nor West'. The principle of neutrality was augmented by the sentiment to 'Islamicize' the republic's foreign policy, and to reorientate the country towards closer political and economic contact and cooperation with the Third World countries in general. Another key feature of the republic's foreign policy was its stated wish to 'export' its Islamic revolution and remake the region in its own image.

Broadly speaking, three phases can be observed in the international behaviour of Iran since the revolution. Each phase is indicative of the changing priorities of the regime at home, reactions to internal developments and, to a lesser degree, the balance of forces within the Iranian political elite.

The first phase we have identified as the consolidation stage. During this period (1979–1981), the power struggle between the 'liberals' and the clerical Maktabi forces was in full swing, and our reference to 'consolidation' is intended to highlight: 1) the emergence of a post-Pahlavi foreign policy outlook, and 2) the domination of the Maktabis in the government machinery by the end of this period. In these early years of the republic the differences among the clerical forces had not crystallized into competing factions and thus they tended to adopt a more or less common position on the power struggle with the secularist/non-clerical forces.

The essence of the consolidation phase thus was to develop an alternative, 'Islamic', foreign policy and effectively to change the regional balance of power and order in favour of the Islamist and radical forces. An important aspect of this strategy was the rejection of Western and Communist-bloc alliances in the Middle East (Hiro 1988b).

This phase was accompanied by the gradual entrenchment of the clerics in power and a rejection of the *status quo* in the Middle East. Iran found itself at odds with a number of its neighbours and former friends between 1981 and 1988. Regionally, by 1987 Iran was at odds with Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, North Yemen and Afghanistan. It could only count Syria as its ally and South Yemen and Libya as friendly countries. Although it maintained normal relations with three other countries (Algeria, Pakistan and Turkey), two of them non-Arab, neither Pakistan nor Turkey had developed strategic ties with the Islamic Republic.

A review of Iran's regional policy in the 1980s reveals a multifaceted and multidimensional foreign policy aimed at enhancing the republic's influence in the Middle East and penetrating areas hitherto closed to Tehran. Generally speaking, four aspects of Iran's regional policy need to be examined further.

- 1 In the Persian Gulf sub-region, Tehran was following a three-pronged strategy: to defeat Iraq militarily, to drive a wedge between Baghdad

and the Gulf Arab states, and to cultivate a constituency for itself among the Gulf Arab peoples (particularly the Shi'i population) at the same time as subverting the most vulnerable regimes of the traditional monarchies.

- 2 With its non-Arab neighbours, particularly Pakistan and Turkey, Tehran sought to maintain cordial relations, and never really Islamicize the basis of its relations with these states. The post-1979 situation in Afghanistan, however, provided Iran's new rulers not only with an opportunity to reassert their traditional authority among the Afghanis, but also enabled Tehran to ride the Islamist revival in that country and carve for itself a new basis of activity in Soviet-occupied (and post-Soviet) Afghanistan.
- 3 In the Levant, Tehran was seeking to deepen its newly found alliance with Syria while also capitalizing on the politicization of the Shi'i community in the Lebanon, in addition to attempting to form a broad constituency among the Shi'a in that country. This it did rather patiently and by careful exploitation of the Israeli-Syrian stand-off in Lebanon. The creation of Hizbollah and Tehran's ability to deploy armed revolutionaries among the Shi'i strongholds were the main achievements of Iran's Lebanon policy. The importance of Lebanon to Tehran was also to be found in geopolitical factors: 'Through its presence in Lebanon, Iran could hope to break out of the narrow geopolitical confines of the war with Iraq and reach a wider constituency within the Arab world' (Agha and Khalidi 1995:18).
- 4 The second aspect of Tehran's Levant strategy focused on the Arab- and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At one level, Tehran was anxious to bury the legacy of the Israeli-Iranian alliance of the Pahlavi era, and thus was very keen to draw itself closer to the Palestinians. This it attempted to do, first by 'Islamicizing' the Arab struggle against Israel, and second, in the absence of any viable Islamic Palestinian factions in the first half of the 1980s, through developing contacts with the radical and rejectionist factions. Even in this regard, Iran was careful not to alienate Damascus and seemed to have kept its list of Palestinian factions very similar to the one endorsed by Syria.

By 1988 military and political developments in the region had forced a reassessment of the entrenchment strategy of the republic. Even though a real pragmatist strand had been in evidence in Iran since 1984/5 (Ramazani 1986; Behrooz 1991), the turning-point seems to have come with the US-Iranian naval engagements of 1987 and the UN's passing of SCR 598, and Iran's battlefield defeats of early 1988. The appointment of Speaker Rafsanjani as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces illustrated the

ascendancy of the pragmatists in power, and Iran's unconditional acceptance of SCR 598 owes much to his appointment as C-in-C and his wish to end the war before a complete collapse of the Iranian war effort. For want of a better phrase, we term this transition from radicalism to accommodation as the 'reorientation phase'. This period started in earnest in June 1988 and lasted until August 1990, at which time we see the end of the transition to pragmatism and the establishment of the pragmatist line in Iran's foreign policy, a tendency which was reinforced by Iran's economic needs. The ascendancy of the pragmatist line in Iran's desire to end the eight-year war with Iraq marked the point from which the Thermidor of the Iranian revolution could also be said to have commenced (Mozaffari 1993).

MAJOR WATERSHEDS IN THE EVOLUTION OF IRAN'S POST-WAR STRATEGY

1988

The most important development of 1988 in the Persian Gulf was Iran's unconditional acceptance of SCR 598, almost a year after its unanimous passing by the UN Security Council. At the time, Iranian leaders insisted that peace was now in the best interests of the republic and that in accepting SCR 598 and sowing the seeds of peace they were countering the direct intervention of the 'Satanic' powers in the Persian Gulf region, which Iran could no longer either ignore or confront militarily. This is the first policy watershed of the republic which needs to be noted and it is important for three main reasons. First, it indicates reversal of a major foreign policy objective: defeat of President Hussein of Iraq and his overthrow. Second, Iran's acceptance of SCR 598 opened the door to normalization of relations with its other Gulf Arab neighbours, so that by the end of 1988 Tehran had managed to re-establish cordial relations with all of the Gulf states bar Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Third, in accepting SCR 598 Iran also indicated its interest in developing a viable security structure for the Persian Gulf sub-region in cooperation with all of its Arab neighbours. Indeed, from November onwards Iran made repeated references to the need for finding collective security structures for the Gulf area in many of its discussions with its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbours.

Apart from these strictly regional dimensions of the cease-fire, the cessation of hostilities between Iran and Iraq (one of the Soviet Union's Arab allies and its main military customer) removed the obstacles to closer contacts between Tehran and Moscow, a process which was helped in no small way by the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. During 1989 a flurry of diplomatic activity between the two neighbours culminated in Foreign Minister

Shevardnadze's trip to Tehran and Speaker Rafsanjani's high-level visit to Moscow in June. The latter trip resulted in the signing of a multi-billion-dollar trade and military cooperation agreement between Iran and the USSR.

The cease-fire also enabled Iran to reaffirm its ties to its non-Arab neighbours, Pakistan and Turkey. Better relations with these countries, bilaterally and in the context of the Tehran-based Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), of which all three were founding members, became a new imperative for Iran. ECO and Iran's relations with Pakistan and Turkey were particularly important to Tehran in the post-cease-fire Gulf environment, if for no other reason than the fact that by 1989 Iran had found itself surrounded by Arab alliances; Iraq had formed the four-member Arab Cooperation Council in 1989 and the GCC had managed to consolidate itself as a key Gulf-based organization, in spite of its internal weaknesses and the absence of any close military and security ties between its members.

Iran's Lebanon policy too was subject to review after 1988. From our point of view, Iran's Lebanon policy is important for three reasons: until recently Iranian policy towards Lebanon had been a measure of the power struggle between the pragmatist and Maktabi factions of the Iranian political elite, it was a barometer of the Syrian-Iranian alliance and it provided a test of Iran's policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and its attitude towards developments in the Levant in general. In order to minimize the influence of the Maktabis, represented at the time by Hojjatoleslams Mohtashemi (a close ally of the Lebanese Hizbollah movement), Mohammad Khojini and Ayatollahs Mohammad Reyshahri and Sadeq Khalkhali, on Iran's foreign policy in general and the Levant in particular, the President made it his business to take charge of this dimension of policy.

With implications for Iran's relations with Syria, the pragmatists were keen to wrestle the republic's Lebanon policy away from the Maktabis. Mohtashemi's ties to the radical Islamist groups in Lebanon always carried the potential to disrupt and hamper the foreign (and economic) reforms of the pragmatists and thus had to be severed. By the same token, Mohtashemi's diminishing influence within the Iranian political and military-revolutionary establishment enabled Rafsanjani to take direct control of the republic's policies in Lebanon, including the hostages issue, to renew Iran's relations with mainstream Syrian-supported Amal organization and to moderate Iran's policies towards the secular Lebanese-based Palestinian movements, without too much fallout at home. The presence of Nabih Berri, leader of the Amal movement, at Ayatollah Khomeini's official mourning ceremonies in June 1989 indicated that the pragmatists had won the day.

A number of regional developments in 1990 heightened Tehran's concern with its own position in the post-Iran-Iraq war situation in the Middle East. An ever-present problem was lack of progress in the bilateral negotiations

with Iraq. Iran had become acutely aware of the destabilizing impact of the 'no war no peace' stalemate with Iraq on its relations with the GCC countries and for its reform strategy and was desperate to bring the negotiations towards discussion of complete cessation of hostilities. The situation was worrying also as Iran seemed unable to check the slide of its only Arab ally, Syria, towards Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the pro-Western Arab camp.

Although close contacts between Tehran and Damascus were maintained, the *rapprochement* in Syrian-Egyptian relations in 1990, and the success of the Saudi-Syrian-sponsored Taif agreement for Lebanon raised the prospects of a re-emergence of the same tripartite alliance between Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria which had existed in the mid-1970s. The danger from Tehran's perspective was that the presence of such an Arab alliance could only lead to the marginalization of Iran's regional role. While, in the 1970s, the Shah's regime had been relatively successful, with the help of regional and extra-regional allies it has to be said, in containing the influence of this alliance in the Persian Gulf sub-region, Iran's post-Khomeini leadership clearly could not do likewise because it did not have the same range of resources and policy options open to it. It had no diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia or Egypt, and it could offer few, if any, incentives to Syria to resist the lure of Saudi oil and petro-dollars and Egyptian diplomatic clout. Nor could Iran hope, in the short term, to be able to substitute its alliance with Syria with another Arab state such as Jordan, Morocco or Tunisia (or influential Arab groups like the PLO), as it did not enjoy diplomatic or close political relations with many of them. As a corollary to the problems associated with the emergence of new Arab alliances, the Saudi-hosted Taif process was to reduce substantially Iran's influence in the Lebanon, a country which had long been cherished by the radical Islamists in Iran as ripe for the propagation of the Khomeinist's revolutionary message and which offered Iran a politico-military foothold in a 'front-line' Arab state.

The Kuwait crisis

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was a mixed blessing as far as Iran was concerned, even though in Tehran's eyes the Baghdad regime's behaviour seemed to have vindicated its policies towards Iraq, as many GCC countries came to acknowledge after the invasion. The immediate impact of the invasion on Iran was twofold: it raised Iran's profile and highlighted its significance as a regional player (the crisis helped in opening all of the frozen channels of communications with Iran's Arab neighbours) (Poya 1991) and it raised regional tensions and caused the return of Western powers to the Gulf sub-region, thus weakening Tehran's ability to shape the policies of the GCC and forge ties with the Gulf sheikhdoms based on collective action.

Iran's position during this crisis was in sharp contrast to its interventionist and adventurist policies of the post-revolution period. Tehran's neutralist and non-aligned stance and support for the UN position throughout, coupled by its vociferous condemnation of the invasion, brought the republic substantial kudos and influence. Thus, in 1990, Iran stood on the side of the West and the return of Kuwait's sovereignty and, by extension, the right of the Al-Sabah family to continue to rule the sheikhdom—indicating a complete change of heart towards the Kuwaiti regime.

While Iran did not actively encourage the war against Iraq, it did expect such a war to weaken significantly its most stubborn regional competitor. President Rafsanjani was clear on Iran's position, despite grave reservations by the Maktabis: 'The Iraqis must definitely pull out... Here, we have no objection to [the "foreign forces"] obstructing aggression; anybody may help in any way' (*SWB* 27 August 1990). Neutrality in this conflict gave Tehran a large measure of flexibility in its foreign relations. It gave it scope to deal with Iraq as well as the anti-war Arab forces, while its insistence on the reversal of the aggression and an unconditional Iraqi pull-out brought it closer to the anti-Iraq Gulf monarchies. Its restraint and neutrality also obtained for Iran renewed diplomatic relations with Jordan, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia and some constructive contacts with Egypt and Morocco. Its position, moreover, did not seem to affect adversely its alliance with Syria (in spite of the latter's participation in the US-led multinational force) nor indeed its relations with Iraq, Sudan, Yemen and Libya. Iran's neutrality did not seem to affect its relations with Turkey and Pakistan either, both of whom came down in support of the Western military position during the crisis. Furthermore, Iran did not actively aid any of the anti-Western Islamist movements in the region, least of all its own Iraqi Shi'i creation, the Tehran-based Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Even against the Iraqi armed forces' onslaught of Shi'i positions in southern Iraq in the Spring of 1991 Iran refused to extend much more than humanitarian and some military aid to the rebel forces.

In the context of the deep Arab divisions and the paralysis of the Arab League in dealing with the crisis, Iran's mediating role was welcomed by the international community and the various Arab camps. In this recognition of its role Iran saw the basis of a closer relationship which would help its reconstruction efforts, assisted by this stage by sharp rises in the price of oil.

As a consequence of the crisis, Iran was to win the victory over Iraq which had eluded it on the battlefield. Iraq capitulated to Iran fully and accepted the full implementation of SCR 598 and the 1975 Algiers Agreement concerning their border dispute. Back in 1980 Iraq had rejected the 1975 agreement as unfair and in the interests of Iran. By December 1990 the UN had also recognized Iraq as the 'aggressor' party in the Iran-Iraq war and

had cleared the way for Iranian war reparations claims from Iraq of billions of dollars.

The Rafsanjani leadership skilfully used the crisis to weaken further the *Maktabis* who were calling for 'holy war' against the Western powers in an alliance with Iraq, and by demonstrating the executive's moderation put a distance between the regime and the Rushdie affair—the main cause of tension between Tehran and the EC. Improvements in 'understanding' between the two sides meant that EC countries could improve their bilateral ties with Tehran and also assist it in the country's reconstruction drive.

The Persian Gulf in the aftermath of operation 'Desert Storm'

The end of the military campaign for the liberation of Kuwait left in its wake a region devastated by war and much poorer in financial terms. The crisis had cost the GCC dear, with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates bearing the greatest proportion of the cost of the military campaign. Between them the three GCC members had contributed some US\$17 billion to the cost of the military campaign (*MEES* 15 April 1991).

Despite Iran's efforts to limit Western military presence in the Persian Gulf sub-region to a minimum and seek collective security guarantees for this strategic waterway, in the aftermath of the war a series of bilateral defence pacts between the main Western players and a number of GCC states had been signed. In effect, the GCC countries were paving the way for a permanent Western military presence in the Persian Gulf—something which Iran had thought its acceptance of SCR 598 would have avoided. Moreover, the creation in March 1991 of the '6+2' Gulf security pact between the GCC and Egypt and Syria raised alarm bells in Tehran that its 'backyard' was being developed as an exclusively Arab area. Despite these moves, at a GCC summit meeting in May 1991 mention was made of the importance of Iran to any Persian Gulf security discussions and subsequently some currency was given to Iran's proposals for a '6+1' security arrangement with Iranian guarantees. No firm action ensued, however, on either 6+2 or 6+1 arrangements for Gulf security. To Iran's dismay, Western countries such as the USA, France and Britain continued, through bilateral security arrangements, to underwrite the security of the GCC countries and to provide all the means for their defence and development.

The Middle East in the aftermath of the Kuwait crisis

Isolation of Iraq in the region and the active role of Arab armies in the defence of Kuwait brought with it renewed pressures to address the Middle

East's most serious problem, the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Iranian diplomacy, the Madrid process was a minefield, not only because it threatened to subsume Syria in a Western-oriented peace agreement with Israel, but because it was Iran which was being left out of the calculations and the unfolding post-1990 regional order. Although, generally speaking, Tehran could see the problems with the proposed peace process, it was none the less rather concerned that the emergence of new agendas between Israel and the Arab states and the Palestinians had left no room for Iranian involvement except in opposition to the whole process. This role Iran readily adopted on the grounds that the Madrid process was US-inspired (i.e., that Washington had a hidden agenda) and that it was designed to rob the Palestinians of their rights in favour of Israel's regional ambitions and aspirations. Tehran's overtly Islamic profile, furthermore, necessitated it opposing the peace process on religious grounds. The destruction of Israel had been at the forefront of Iran's propaganda since the beginning of the revolution, in spite of Tehran's military contacts with Israel.

Also problematic for Iran was the way in which the peace process was sucking in Iran's Gulf Arab neighbours and thus adding to Tehran's sense of isolation and loss of influence in the Persian Gulf sub-region. This sense of diminishing control has been heightened since 1993 with many GCC states opening direct channels of communications and trade talks with Israel and the Gulf states' willingness to bring the process (at the multilateral and bilateral levels) to the Gulf itself (note Oman's hosting of the multilateral talks on water in April 1994 which included Israel, the visit of the late Prime Minister Rabin to Muscat in December 1994 and the establishment of direct trade links between the Jewish state and Oman in September 1995, and Qatar's increasingly overt contacts with Israeli business and political leaders, and Prime Minister Peres's high-level visit to Oman and Qatar in early April 1996). Indeed, anxious not to fall too far behind the caravan, Tehran, we have been reliably informed, had sent non-participating delegates to the Muscat talks in April 1994. Iran's low-key presence at such gatherings, however, has not hidden its concern over the GCC states' participation in the peace process and their desire to establish bilateral security agreements with the US and its European allies, with the danger of Tehran being side-stepped in its own 'backyard'.

Economic crisis, economic reform and foreign policy

Iran's economic problems in the 1980s necessitated an overhaul of the economy. The crisis was indeed serious and multifaceted: negative growth, high unemployment, low productivity and underutilization of capacity, shortages of investment capital, high import dependency, managerial

weaknesses, substantial loss-making enterprises under state control, a ballooning public sector and lack of confidence in government policy (Amuzegar 1993). So, Iran's economic reform strategy was designed to restructure the economy and deal with these structural and policy-induced ills.

The reform process was designed to commence in the first year of Rafsanjani's presidency, happening to coincide with the fallout of the Kuwait crisis. The optimism in the economic fortunes of Iran that accompanied the windfall oil income of 1990 was soon replaced by deep anxieties about the economy and instabilities of the post-war regional order. The anxiety stemmed not only from Iran's high import bills in the early 1990s, but also from the negative impact of the oil price drop on the economy and currency reform.

Iran's many economic difficulties merely reinforced the country's dependence on oil and the need to generate investment capital, technology and industrial expertise from the Western countries. The realization of Iran's vulnerabilities strengthened the hand of the President and his allies in dealing with the hardliners and registered the need to continue with the conciliatory foreign policy line in order to remedy, with Western support, the economy.

IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Two schools of thought are apparent in the Iranian foreign policy-making community about the New World Order (NWO) and Iran's place within it and, as becomes clear below, both perspectives' instinctive (and implicit) assumption about the regime's responses to Iran's position in the New World Order is that there is a need to strengthen the power and extend the reach of the central government. None challenge the assumptions regarding state autonomy in Iran: indeed, because of the changes in the international system, state autonomy is being seen as a valuable asset in finding a new place for Iran and in confronting and countering the undesirable fallout of the New World Order. In the battles ahead, one can see the dawn of an era in which the relationship between state autonomy and territorial integrity of Iran become a positive-sum game, in which the security of the latter becomes synonymous with the survival of the elite controlling the state.

One, positive, interpretation of international developments since 1989/90 focuses on opportunities afforded Iran. With the demise of the Soviet Union and prospects for more manoeuvrability due to the end of the Cold War and the strategic competition between Moscow and Washington in regions such as the Middle East, Iran can emerge as a strong regional

power. In the absence of superpower pressures Tehran is well placed to create a new regional order in which Iran would hold the balance of power. In the new situation, power derived from a combination of the Islamic revolution and the country's oil wealth would enhance Tehran's abilities to influence regional developments in its own favour. Therefore, Tehran should grasp the nettle and adopt a pro-active strategy in the Middle East and in the Asian territories of the former Soviet Union. To do this successfully, Tehran needs to create new, and deepen its existing, regional alliances.

Proponents of this school also argue that although the end of superpower rivalries may have ended the post-1945 pattern of engagement in the Middle East, continuing competition between the USA, the European Union and Japan over the resources of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia and Azerbaijan will inevitably generate new rivalries at the international level which, with careful planning, Tehran will be able to exploit at the regional level. In other words, they believe that while the old 'negative balance' arguments may no longer apply, continuing rivalries at the international level will, in the medium term, allow Iran to apply the same model to the new situation and secure independence of action and room for manoeuvre. Negative balance could, therefore, re-emerge as a pillar of Iran's foreign policy in the New World Order if this line prevails.

Furthermore, leading intellectual elements in the country (like Davoud Bavand and Saeed Hadjarian) argue that in Central Asia and the Caucasus at least, largely due to American fear of Russian nationalism, there may exist a congruence of interests between Iran and the USA (and its ally, Turkey) (*MEQ* Summer 1995), which means that Washington's strategy in this part of the post-Soviet empire opens up (or at least does not block) for Iran considerable economic opportunities and offers Tehran more diplomatic room for manoeuvre.

The second school, our interviews with Iranian officials reveal, view the end of the Cold War and the demise of the USSR with deep concern. Iran can no longer rely on the tried and tested strategy of the 'negative balance' between Washington and Moscow. In this view, Iran has effectively been sidelined. With their rivalry over, Iran is seen as less valuable strategically to the superpowers. It has no value to the West in terms of 'containing' the Soviet threat to vital Western interests in the Middle East. Moreover, as there appear to be no external threats to US interests in the Middle East, the USA will inevitably increase its pressure on those regional states which manage to function outside of its sphere of influence and perhaps those with the potential to undermine its vital interests in the Persian Gulf sub-region and the rest of the Middle East. Iran in the New World Order is a prime candidate for such a treatment, according to this view. It should be noted in this regard that the ways in which the New World Order has been manifesting itself in the

Middle East (continuation of the Arab-Israeli peace process; domestic stability of the GCC states; security of oil resources; security of passage of Gulf oil and supply routes; security of Israel; containment of 'Islamic fundamentalism'; maintenance of the regional *status quo* at all costs; minimization of the regional power and influence of Iraq, Iran, Libya and, to a lesser degree, Syria) do carry major costs for the Islamic Republic. Even in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the proponents of this school argue, Washington is bent on 'freezing' Iran out of its emerging markets. They argue that not only are US-Russian ties much stronger than is normally acknowledged, but that Washington's acceptance of Moscow's 'near abroad' doctrine means that the USA is unlikely to challenge Russia's hegemony in Central Asia and the Caucasus or to look on Iran as a potential buffer against Russian expansionism (MEQ Summer 1995).

Elements in this school also maintain that it is wrong to assume that in the New World Order, the hydrocarbon needs of the Western countries will lead to competition over control of these resources. Far from competing for control, the West will unite to prevent the monopolization of these resources by any local power unfriendly to the West. Therefore, the more hardline Iran's stance becomes on such issues as oil pricing, Gulf security and broader political developments in the region, the greater the pressures on it. Such pressures will manifest themselves in two ways: the demand to isolate Iran regionally and internationally and to reduce the regime's room for manoeuvre. A major Iranian worry about such a Western strategy should be that in order to end Iran's geopolitical dominance of the Gulf and Western Asia, Washington may attempt to divide Iran along ethnic lines and thus 'balkanize' it. In the national interest, therefore, and in order to reduce the chances of success of such a Western strategy, Tehran should pursue a conciliatory and non-antagonistic foreign policy at the same time as strengthening the power and capabilities of the central government.

The Rafsanjani administration has been trying to swim between both these currents of thinking, for both perspectives contain much truth. Tehran is trying to minimize its regional isolation by improving ties with its neighbours, including Iraq, as well as deepening its alliance with Syria, at the same time as projecting itself into Central Asia and the Caucasus (Calabrese 1994). It is also hoping that Russia's deteriorating economic situation and the rise of Rightist forces there would make Western powers sufficiently nervous to revert to their containment strategy of the Federation and in this strike a tacit alliance with regional powers such as Iran, who themselves would be wary of such developments in Russia. The problems for Iran of such a scenario coming to pass are twofold. First, can Iran afford to antagonize a galvanized Russia by being seen to be acting against Moscow's interests? Second, in the absence of other high-value military

partners, can Iran survive without Moscow's support for its rearmament drive and its potential support in the Security Council?

So, if we were to find a general foreign policy strategy for Tehran, it would need to contain the following as its main elements: for Iran to develop the techniques to exploit growing divisions between the USA and its European allies and Japan, thus reversing its US-imposed isolation by working more closely with Washington's security allies but economic competitors; and to wait for the resurgence of Russian nationalism and hope to be able to revalue Iran's worth as a counter to Russian expansionism in the Middle East and Central Asia—a return to 'containment' of Moscow's influence. But, as we have already mentioned, the latter course could pose a direct threat to Iran itself, though it could also recreate the underlying conditions for Tehran to seek politico-military cooperation with the USA's regional allies.

Here, Iran's nuclear ambitions become particularly relevant, for while Tehran recognizes that it may take another decade or more before it can deploy even a rudimentary nuclear device, its ambitions in this regard could undermine such cooperative strategies. To a large degree, though, Tehran is hostage to the rapidly changing regional and international system and to the Iranian leaders' concerns that the country's integrity and sovereignty could be challenged without such a capability at Tehran's disposal. In the post-Cold War era, ethnic revivalist tendencies and religious tensions have crept into Iranian civil society and such developments have further heightened Tehran's concerns over the territorial integrity of the country.

Iran is also mindful of the security implications of having a number of existing, potential and near-potential nuclear states in the area—Russia, Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Israel in particular. Iran's nuclear ambitions are being fed by the calculations it has to make about the policies and future behaviour of these nuclear powers as well as the multitude of systemic transformations at the sub-regional, regional and international levels.

In examining Iran's behaviour, it becomes clear that when Tehran feels left out of regional developments it tends to favour playing the spoiler in the region, and thus buys itself influence through threatening to undermine the *status quo*. In this regard, it could always rely on Islamist groups in Lebanon and elsewhere to do the dirty work. Second, as the post-Cold War order tended to encourage 'regionalization' of the international system, Tehran opted to do two things: to found its own regional groupings and deepen the scope of existing ones (ECO, Caspian Sea Organization), in addition to trying to work with the GCC and the South Asian grouping of states, and to improve its alliance with states like Syria in the Middle East and deepen its ties with China, North Korea and Russia (and possibly India) outside of the Middle East—all of whom incidentally offer Tehran

military and nuclear expertise. None the less, Tehran fully recognizes, though, that these contacts are no long-term substitutes for closer ties with the Western powers, particularly the Western European countries.

For Iran, the 1990s has ushered in a new era and a highly unpredictable one. Since the late 1980s Tehran has had to respond to systemic changes around it and has been compelled to function as much as possible within the new international system, which not only witnessed the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet superpower (both territorially and intellectually) in the North, but also the emergence of the USA as the undisputed extra-regional power in the Middle East (Mahdi 1994). Concern with the country's territorial integrity has also been heightened with ethnic resurgence becoming the order of the day in the post-Soviet, post-Cold War international situation and the successes of nationalist movements in evolving from insurgencies to territorial states. Fear that secessionist movements in Iran and on its borders could be used by outside powers to destabilize the country and the regime have struck a cord with Islamists and nationalists alike both in and out of the country. The Islamists and many of the nationalists are keen to strengthen the grip of central authority in the provinces and to deploy military force to counter the power of centrifugal forces, while some elements of the exiled nationalists view tribal reassertion as a useful means of weakening the Islamic regime. The latter forces would, albeit inadvertently, be weakening Iran as a territorial state.

At the same time, largely thanks to Iran's launching of its post-war Five-year Plans and its continuing economic crisis, in broad terms the country's economic priorities have come to tally with its foreign policy. The main feature of this behavioural change can be observed from Tehran's moderation and its *realpolitik* policy in its contacts with neighbours and the abandonment, at least at the formal level, of 'export of the Islamic revolution' to the rest of the region, Arab and non-Arab alike (Entessar 1994). Economic necessities—the need for foreign capital and expertise, trade links, importance of expatriate resources, the need to diversify the economy, etc.—have in turn affected economic policy. New economic policies, however, including privatization of industry, mines and services as well as liberalization of economic activity, have come to influence the direction and thrust of Iran's foreign policy. Thus, in recent years a symbiotic relationship has evolved between economic necessity and Iran's foreign policy.

None of this means, however, that Iran is withdrawing from the region or that it is shelving its interest in Islamist movements in the Middle East and beyond. Far from it. It is worth recalling at this point that we are still dealing with a regime and a system of government which emerged from the ashes of a profoundly powerful revolution, perhaps the greatest that the region has so far experienced. When the chips are down, the regime's

instinct is to turn to its natural constituency and those forces that spearheaded its drive for power. Through seeking their support, the administration rediscovers itself and its roots, and for the sake of their support, if nothing else, it is unable to erase its past and forget its origins. Indeed, as the post-Khomeini regime's legitimacy is almost entirely based on the revolution and the system founded by Ayatollah Khomeini, it cannot negate the principles of Ayatollah Khomeini's outlook without negating itself, as its Maktabi opponents constantly remind Rafsanjani's administration.

So, while it is true to say that Tehran has been redefining its priorities in recent years and has been reconsidering Iran's place in the world, it would be unrealistic to expect it to abandon the system's *modus operandi* or indeed to forego its Islamic profile purely for the sake of economic gains. This indeed is the view of many in the clerical establishment. Note the Friday sermon of a senior cleric (Ayatollah Abdolkarim Moussavi-Ardebili):

It was not the objective of the revolution to become like some countries [namely Japan] which have a strong and sound economy, a strong currency and a high standard of living... The objectives of the revolution were far superior to these.

(SWB 16–17 August 1993)

Furthermore, and as Amirahmadi notes, 'As long as Iran and the Islamic movements [in the Muslim world] espouse the same ideals and radical ideology, this congruity of purpose will enhance the visibility of Iran and its strength in international politics' (Amirahmadi 1994:118). So, Tehran will continue to capitalize on Islam in its international profile.

This said, we would like to argue that while nominally the orientation of the republic remains similar to that advocated by the republic's founding fathers, in practice the Rafsanjani administration's domestic priorities have taken precedence over long-term ideological foreign policy posturing. While some analysts would agree with the thrust of our arguments (note Graham Fuller's (1991) analysis of Iran's foreign policy, for example), others would probably disagree with our assessment of the Iranian scene. Two such commentators on post-Khomeini Iran, Clawson (1993) and Chubin (1994) believe, through different reasoning, that the regime remains a source of tension and instability and a vehicle for subversion of the post-Gulf war order in the Middle East. Clawson believes that the triumph of the moderates in the power struggle should be viewed with suspicion because these forces could prove to be more dangerous to the West than their predecessors. His key point is that 'Iran's moderates do not differ profoundly from its radicals with respect to foreign policy' (Clawson 1993:46). He argues that

the push for prosperity by the moderates is not necessarily a stabilizing influence. Indeed, Tehran's focus on economic growth rather than Islamic purity as the main activity of the government could become a new source of instability in the region, if Iranians conclude that the shortest and least painful route to prosperity lies in pressuring their neighbors.

(*ibid.*: 37)

While we may disagree with Clawson's conclusions, he is correct in pointing, as we have done, to the continuing crisis of leadership in Tehran and the impact of rivalries between factions and various power centres on the republic's foreign policy. We do not, however, believe that the changes in some key personnel, power structures, policy-making processes and the material needs of the state count for nothing when analysing post-Khomeini Iran. Here too, problems remain. But, as Chubin shows, the impact of domestic constraints on foreign policy is to be found in the subtle ways that the revolution's original aims interact with new realities. The presence of competing power centres has merely compounded the difficulty of overcoming the paralysis in strategic thinking and policy failures of the 1980s. It is to be noted though that, although we do not believe that the government 'has no freedom in foreign policy' (Chubin 1994:68), there is much truth in the argument that due to the fractured nature of policy-making in Iran, foreign policy initiatives are at best compromises between competing perspectives and interests. As such, therefore, Tehran is seemingly unable to project and pursue a clearly defined and consistent foreign policy, even though the Rafsanjani leadership has tried very hard to institutionalize a break from the past.

As already mentioned, the fulfilment of domestic objectives has indeed necessitated a restructuring of the republic's foreign policy. A corollary of national politico-military strength is that the leadership has developed a perception of Iran's role in the region based less on Iran as the hub of an expanding Islamic revolution, but rather as regaining its position as a militarily powerful and politically influential player in the region—towards becoming a regional power.

4 The foreign policy of Syria

The Syrian state began as a fragile, artificial entity at odds with itself and profoundly irredentist, yet it enjoyed few power resources and was a recurrent victim of stronger neighbours. Within 20 years it had been transformed into a regional middle power. No other Arab state has proved so adept at exercising power out of proportion to its natural endowments or so resolute in ensuring that its interests could not be ignored.

THE DURABLE DETERMINANTS OF SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The historic roots of irredentism

Syrian foreign policy attitudes have been shaped by the historical frustration of Syrian nationalist aspirations by Western imperialism. In the wake of the 1917 Arab revolt, Syrians expected the creation of an independent Arab state in historic Syria (Bilad al-Sham) linked to a wider Arab federation. Instead, betraying their promises to the Arabs, the Western powers subjugated the Arab East, dismembered historic Syria into four mini-states (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine), and sponsored the colonization and establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine (Tibawi 1969:209–378; Zeine 1960). In time, Syria gained political independence, but its separation from Jordan, Lebanon and the Arab world proved irreversible; Israel became a formidable enemy on Syria's doorstep and a permanent obstacle to its nationalist aspirations. The resulting powerful brew of anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, pan-Arab and pan-Syrian sentiment imparted an enduring revisionist and irredentist thrust to Syrian political culture. This revisionism reached a climax in the effort of the radical wing of the Ba'th Party (1966–1970) to make Damascus the bastion of a pan-Arab revolution and a war of popular liberation

in Palestine. This, however, only brought on the 1967 defeat and the Israeli occupation of new Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan Heights. The 1967 defeat brought home the high costs of messianic revisionism and ushered in an era of realist foreign policy under Hafiz al-Asad. However, it also further locked Syria into the struggle with Israel. Syria's historic grievances remained alive and many Syrians continued, at heart, to reject the legitimacy of the *status quo* even as they came to accept its inevitability.

Geopolitics

A rational foreign policy is not shaped merely by frustrations, however, and must adapt to the geopolitically shaped power balance. Geography has determined both the threats and opportunities Syria confronts in its external environment. It has also determined the bases of potential 'national power'. Syria's relatively small size and population provided a limited manpower base and little strategic depth or deterrence to invasion. Syrian decision-makers could not escape the reality that the country's limited natural and economic resources were too slim to support their foreign policy ambitions without external assistance.

On the other hand, Syria's location at the very heart of the Middle East enjoyed exceptional geographic importance. Few countries had so many doors that opened on to so many distinct but interacting geopolitical realms. This permitted Asad's Syria to assert leadership over its Arab neighbours in the Levant. This centrality and Syria's frontline position with Israel gave Syria an importance which could be parlayed into resources—notably Arab aid—and diplomatic support beyond its own borders. It also made Syria and Israel natural competitors for control of the Levant.

But, by the same token, Syria's geographical position was highly vulnerable to external pressures, being unprotected by natural boundaries and exposed on all sides to countries which, at one time or another, have constituted threats: Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and, above all, Israel. For a long time Syria was the prey of the rival ambitions of the more cohesive river-based states of Egypt and Iraq (Seale 1964). Iraq under hostile leadership continues to pose a threat from the East. Syria is one of only two Arab states which confront two non-Arab neighbours. Turkey has held hostage the Euphrates' water Syria depends on. Syria lost the Golan Heights, its one natural defence against its main enemy, Israel, in 1967 and is also vulnerable to Israeli outflanking movements through Jordan and Lebanon. In every one of its wars with Israel, Syria suffered major punishment and Israel projected its power further—onto the Golan, into Lebanon. The dominance of Syria's regional environment by threats and constraints naturally made security a prime preoccupation. Almost inevitably Syria will either be a

victim of these neighbouring powers or will attempt to balance them through some combination of internal power mobilization and alliance formation. Hence Syria's constant need for alliances to prevent its isolation and its ambition to acquire a deterrent and to approach power parity with Israel.

Role-conception: Syro-centric Arabism

The circumstances of Syria's formation as a state have shaped an ambiguous national identity which, together with residual revisionism and geopolitical realities, shaped a distinctive foreign policy role-conception: this role-conception can be seen as an autonomous determinant of foreign policy.

Because of Syria's geographic position at the heart of the Arab East and astride a land without a historic tradition of statehood, national identity focused on a larger Arab nation rather than the contemporary Syrian state, which has long been regarded as a creation of imperialism. Overcoming the fragmentation of the Arab world was seen as the historic mission of Ba'thism, the official ideology; Syria was seen not as a national unit but as a base for this mission. Indeed, Syria was the most consistent centre of Arabist sentiment (Drysdale and Hinnebusch 1991:54–58).

Syrian leaders, however, lacked the power and will to overcome the fragmentation of the Arab nation by the Western-imposed state system. The gap between the pan-Arab ideal and foreign policy behaviour steadily widened. Forty years of statehood and disappointments with unity experiments largely removed unionist ambitions from the foreign policy agenda under Asad. Nevertheless, Syrians still did not perceive the regional environment as a classical state system of distinct national entities; the Arab states were still thought to make up a nation with an overriding national interest that ought to govern their foreign policies. Syria's special identity remained Arab: Syrians viewed Syria as the 'beating heart of Arabism'. Syria's special role or mission was to defend the Arab nation in the struggle with Israel.

On this basis, Syrian leaders claimed the right to define the higher Arab national interest and viewed Syria's military-security needs—as the most steadfast of the frontline states in the battle with Israel—to be virtually indistinguishable from this. From the viewpoint that 'what's good for Syria is good for the Arab nation', they felt entitled to draw on the oil wealth of other Arab states and to discipline what they considered Palestinian particularism. This view took on an even sharper thrust in Syria's relations with the former 'fallen away' components of Bilad al-Sham over which Syria as the 'parent state' came to presume special rights and responsibilities. As Seale (1992:788–789) points out, Syria perceived itself as taking part in a struggle with Israel over influence over the Levant in what amounted to a contest between Greater

Syria and Greater Israel. It must be noted, however, that for most Syrians and their leaders there was no incompatibility between pan-Arabism and 'Greater Syria', since the latter was an integral part of the wider Arab nation and was not perceived as making up a distinct Syrian nation.

Syria's insistence on the priority of its own needs was bound to end in conflict with other Arab powers at the expense of Arab solidarity. This is especially so when the regime violated conventional Arabist norms in pursuit of its own needs, notably in allying with Iran against Arab Iraq and in the conflicts with the PLO in Lebanon. Yet the identification of Syrian interests with the Arab cause was no mere fiction and a purely Syria-centred policy never took form: had it done so Asad could long ago have pursued a Sadat-like settlement with Israel over the Golan instead of mortgaging Syria's welfare and future to a struggle rooted chiefly in Arabist irredentism, not narrowly defined Syrian *raison d'état*. Syria's interests, as Asad defined them, coincided more than those of other Arab states with wider Arab national goals, and without pan-Arab solidarity those goals could not be achieved. Syria's definition of its 'national interest' and role-conception could best be characterized as Syro-centric Arabism.

By the 1990s, there was evidence that the national identity of Syrians was in transition, moving towards a more distinctly Syrian identity. Long experience with truncated Syria as the habitual framework of normal politics, accumulated consciousness of the costs of bearing Syria's pan-Arab mission, and the separate deals struck by other Arab parties with Israel generated a growing tendency to put Syrian interests first. The persisting dilemma for Syria, however, was that the idea of an exclusively Syrian 'nation' not essentially Arab still held little credibility.

FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

State formation: achieving foreign policy autonomy

The Syrian political structure has in many ways been shaped by its external environment: the product of a party which mobilized a constituency around a combination of nationalism and populist reform and an army radicalized by the conflict with Israel, it developed under Asad into a huge authoritarian national security state. But, it was this state, in turn, which accorded Syrian foreign policy-makers sufficient autonomy and strength to conduct a rational foreign policy able to cope with this environment. This was, however, only achieved over an extended period of state-formation.

Syria's post-independence state was narrowly based on a thin stratum of landlords and wealthy merchants and its institutions failed to absorb the political mobilization of the salaried middle class and the peasants; the

result was praetorian instability, military coups and agrarian unrest. Far from following an effective foreign policy, Syria was the prize over which stronger Arab states fought and its traditional elite was de-legitimized for its inability to cope with Israel or defend the Palestine cause (Seale 1964; Torrey 1964).

The 1963 rise of the Ba'th party to power marked the breaking of the old ruling classes' control of the state. The regime achieved relative autonomy by mobilizing workers and peasants through a semi-Leninist party-state, through the economical levelling of the agrarian-commercial bourgeoisie by land reform and nationalizations, and through the creation of a public sector giving the state an autonomous economic base. The easing of economic dependency on the West through the breaking of the comprador elite and an alliance with the USSR made pursuit of an autonomous foreign policy possible. The Ba'th party attained some legitimacy based on its populist reforms and its championing of Arab nationalism, the main political identity in Syria (Devlin 1976; Petran 1972:167–204; Rabinovich 1972).

However, this regime was plagued by concentrated opposition from urban society and by internal factionalism. Foreign policy became a weapon in these internal power struggles; the regime sought to sustain legitimization through militant rhetoric against Israel while rival Ba'thi factions outbid each other in militancy (Ben Tsur 1968). The irrationality of this policy *vis-à-vis* the external arena was manifest in its reckless support for Palestinian guerrillas operating against Israel in spite of an overwhelming power imbalance against Syria. This brought on the 1967 war and major defeat. Hafiz al-Asad's 1970 seizure of power aimed to unify regime and country for the struggle to recover the lost Arab territories from Israel; he designed his regime to carry on this struggle.

Asad constructed an authoritarian-populist Bonapartist regime. He concentrated power in a 'Presidential Monarchy' resting on three fairly developed institutions, the Ba'th party, the army and the bureaucracy which incorporated a cross-class, cross-sectarian coalition. Asad maximized his autonomy through balancing several elements of his coalition. He used support from the army to free himself from party ideological constraints; he then built up his *jama'a*—a core of largely Alawi personal followers in command of intelligence agencies and praetorian guard units—to enhance his autonomy of both army and party (Dawisha 1978a).

The military and security establishments can now be largely depended upon, after years of unreliability, to implement command decisions; mass conscription has approached levels of total national mobilization. Government control of the economy permits commitment of the country's resources to foreign policy goals. The party and its 'mass organizations' incorporate a large segment of the population, most specifically a Sunni

village and trade union base, while the bureaucracy absorbs a large state-dependent salaried middle class. In a tacit 'social contract' the state sought support in exchange for providing its plebeian constituency opportunities for social and political mobility and material benefits such as land, jobs and subsidized goods. Finally, Asad used limited economic liberalization to foster a state-dependent new bourgeoisie and to co-opt key elements of the traditional bourgeoisie. This diversified the regime economic base and enhanced the state's ability to balance between its original populist constituency and a new bourgeois one. The regime's legitimacy formula corresponded to its structure and constituency. Ideological legitimacy from consistency in pursuit of Arab nationalist goals and populism internally was supplemented by patrimonial authority based on the primordial loyalty of the leader's *jama'a* (Hinnebusch 1990:120–275).

This is not to argue that the regime faced no internal threats. The anti-regime animosity of the old upper classes displaced by the Ba'th, the Islamic opposition, the wider Sunni Muslim resentment of the disproportionate role of sectarian minorities (notably the Alawis, 12 per cent of the population) and growing corruption alienated significant sectors of the population. However, the regime passed the durability test in its successful repression of a formidable uprising by an Islamic-bourgeois coalition (1978–1982). This was partly due to the reliability of its Alawi security units, but equally to the ability of the regime's institutions—army, party and bureaucracy—to keep its cross-sectarian coalition together and incorporate the village, thus depriving the largely urban opposition of the ability to mobilize a sufficiently broad anti-regime coalition. Significantly, this main threat to regime stability had no observable impact on foreign policy. A 1984 power struggle within the *jama'a* while Asad was ill also proved a passing episode. While it is likely that opposition and intra-elite conflict will revive in future, the regime has long appeared confident enough to pursue a foreign policy insulated from the immediate requisites of regime stability. As such, the regime possesses the domestic political base for a rational foreign policy (Chalala 1988:113–118; Drysdale 1984; Hinnebusch 1990:276–300).

The policy-making process and domestic politics

Politics among elites

Asad's state concentrated power in the President's hands. A man of strong personality, strategic vision, unique authority within the elite and possessed of wide powers of office, Asad was clearly the dominant decision-maker (Maoz 1978). Yet, at least initially, he appeared to be a relatively consensual

leader who weighed the views of his subordinates. Decisions were taken in a relatively stable circle of top foreign policy and military elites who were Asad's colleagues, not mere staff as in Egypt. On the other hand, though, the elites were not strong politicians associated with distinct views or independent power bases and foreign policy was not decided by bureaucratic politics in which actors rooted in the interests of rival institutions, bargained over or could veto policy. There were no organized dovish or hawkish constituencies on the main foreign policy issue, the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed the core elite functioned as a consensual team from the early 1970s. Vice-President Abdul Halim Khaddam was Asad's senior lieutenant with special responsibility for foreign policy, but he was a loyalist with no record of views distinct from Asad's. Defence Minister Mustafa Tlas and Chief of Staff Hikmat al-Shihabi similarly appeared to be loyalists. The Alawi security barons, such as Ali Duba, were not known to have overtly challenged the President and his demonstrated ability to rotate and demote them indicated their lack of personal power bases. There is some evidence that elites were permitted to express varied preferences over Syria's alignments, perhaps to satisfy extra-elite opinion or other Arab states that had their advocates in regime councils. Thus, Mustafa Tlas long had a reputation as a pro-Saudi critic of the Soviets while Rifaat al-Asad had ties to the West and the Saudis. However, the only politician who built an independent base of power and used it to contest presidential policy, Rifaat al-Asad, fell from power in consequence, when the whole elite combined against him (Hinnebusch 1991:388–389).

The evidence is ambivalent on how far Asad seeks consensus and how much he imposes decisions. The Ba'th elite appears to have been divided over Kissinger's 1974 step-by-step diplomacy; Kissinger found that, by contrast to Egypt where only Sadat had to be convinced, Asad took pains to include collectively the whole top elite in the negotiations. Still, it was Asad who at the last minute closed the deal on the first disengagement and pulled his hard-line colleagues after him (Sheehan 1976). Dawisha (1978b) suggests that a 38-person consultation unit decided on the 1976 Lebanon intervention, but there are also claims that Asad forced this controversial departure from traditional policy on his reluctant colleagues. It is likely that, if Asad feels strongly about a decision, a coalescence of other elites against him is extremely unlikely, that the choice of those to be included in the consultation unit is his and that he stands above and arbitrates among a typically divided elite. There is certainly no evidence that any elite actor has contested Asad's role as final arbiter and survived politically. It appears that, as Asad established his image as a foreign policy wizard and the occasional challenger was purged, foreign policy became virtually the 'reserved sphere' of the presidency.

Foreign policy interest groups

The cohesion and concentration of power in the top elite permitted the making and implementation of foreign policy relatively free of institutionalized constraints. There is, however, some evidence that decision-makers have occasionally felt constrained to take account of the expectations or demands of groups below them in the power structure.

The officer corps as a whole has at times had a reputation for militant Arab nationalism; its reluctance to accept the cease-fire in the October war may have contributed to the 1974 Syrian decision to launch a war of attrition on the Golan and Mount Hermon while the disengagement negotiations were going on (Sheehan 1976). Elements of the military overtly or covertly resisted the 1976 intervention against the Palestinians in Lebanon (Chalala 1985:77). However, senior professional officers like Chief of Staff Hikmat al-Shihabi have been concerned mainly with the capabilities and integrity of the armed forces, and have, therefore, chiefly been advocates of greater defence spending and the acquisition of more advanced weaponry in the race with Israel.

Ba'th party cadres once appeared to constrain the options of top decision-makers by their ideological and nationalist militancy. Prior to the October 1973 war, forces in the party remained adamant against negotiations with Israel, and during the Golan disengagement negotiations their views still limited Asad's flexibility; to make it palatable he had to portray this agreement as a mere first step in Israeli withdrawal from all the conquered lands (Sheehan 1976). Diab (1994:81) claims a 1975 party conference forced Asad to retract an offer of a peace treaty with Israel. There has always been an element in the party which wanted to exchange Asad's Saudi and Egyptian alliances for an Iraqi one. The intervention against Palestinians in Lebanon agitated the party, resulting in a considerable attrition of committed Ba'thists (Chalala 1985:78). The alliance with Iran, offensive to Arabism, was also unpopular in the party base. That the top elite nevertheless persisted in such policies shows the extent to which it can manipulate its base, claiming broad discretion in interpreting party ideology and repressing overt challenges from within its own constituency. Cumulative purges, resignations and new recruitment have greatly diluted the ideological intensity of the Ba'thist ranks, turning the party into a patronage machine more interested in career and personal connections. Thus, broad sustained opposition to the leadership has not crystallized.

By comparison to the party, the foreign policy professionals in the Foreign Ministry and the presidency appear to be voices of pragmatism in regime councils. Though career diplomats seem to carry little institutional weight compared to a country like Egypt, their conduits to the President

give them some influence. But Syria has no think-tanks and the Foreign Ministry is woefully underequipped and underprofessionalized. Syria's entrance into the peace process, where negotiation skills are in immediate demand has enhanced the diplomats' role and Asad has formed an advisory council to guide his diplomacy in the negotiations.

Mass political control and public opinion

The regime enjoyed substantial autonomy of society in the making of foreign policy. The authoritarian state concentrated power in Asad's hands and minimized formal—constitutional or structural—accountability to the public. A population with only around 70 per cent adult literacy is vulnerable to manipulation by an elite with the mass media at its disposal, and on some policy matters the public is inattentive or divided; in times of tension or war with Israel, it tends to close ranks behind the regime. Equally important, the repressive apparatus is effective in silencing dissent, organized opposition is debilitated and the regime has been in a position of strength to co-opt elements of the opposition. The relatively acquiescent public response to the government's 1976 Lebanese intervention against Palestinians, a policy which hitherto seemed politically unimaginable, indicates the wide latitude enjoyed by decision-makers.

This is not to say public opinion has no consequences, for decision-makers may be deterred by the price of ignoring it. Despite state consolidation under Asad, Syria, like any other Arab state, is vulnerable to a relatively high degree of ideological penetration by transstate forces: because the national identity is Arab, the public has had strong attachments to extra-Syrian Arab actors and causes. Until Camp David, there was a strong pro-Egyptian public sentiment which Ba'th leaders had to try to satisfy. The Islamic uprisings of the late 1970s may have been partly a function of the erosion of the regime's legitimacy from its conflict with the Palestinians in Lebanon. Iraq has also been able to appeal to Arab nationalist and Islamic opinion; containment of this internal political penetration by Iraq has shaped Syria's policy towards it more than the regional power balance which would, arguably, dictate a close alliance with Iraq against Israel.

Most important, a 'public mood' has seemed to define certain bounds outside which the regime has not willingly trodden on the core issue of Israel. Such legitimacy as it has enjoyed rests squarely on its claim to represent the national interest against Israel. This is no small matter in a regime where legitimacy is precarious and the nationally mobilized and attentive segment of the public is considerable. This is especially so for an elite whose nationalist credentials are vulnerable to attack because of a heavily minority (Alawi) composition which permits

opponents to challenge its Arabism. Regime legitimacy would be gravely compromised by a settlement with Israel that was not perceived as honourable. Since the 1973 war the regime conditioned a whole generation to accept a peace with Israel as honourable if it entailed Israeli withdrawal from the lands captured in 1967 and satisfaction of Palestinian rights.

Mainstream opinion, tired of years of conflict and stalemate, has long been in favour of a peace settlement, but not at any price: the regime position—peace in return for withdrawal from the occupied lands and satisfaction of Palestinian rights—reflected public opinion fairly accurately until the Oslo accord (Reiser 1984). There has been a militant rejectionist and anti-Western element, especially among intellectuals and Islamic militants, but it has failed to mobilize a mass constituency opposed to an honourable peace. A pro-Western peace tendency, strongest among the commercial bourgeoisie, would have liked to follow Sadat's course, anticipating greater business prosperity and a lesser role for the military and government in society if the war were to end; but the bourgeoisie was by no means uniformly dovish.

In summary, internal constraints on policy existed but they were indirect—Asad's need to calculate the domestic consequences—and they set only the broadest boundaries. Although he may consult elites, Asad has not hesitated to override the opinions of his own power base. While he no doubt weighed the consequences of foreign policy decisions on public opinion, he was often prepared to pay the price in discontent for policies deemed essential on grounds of high strategy. Moreover, on the core foreign policy issue, Israel, the coincidence of domestic opinion and strategic goals reinforced each other.

ASAD'S STRATEGY: THE RATIONAL ACTOR

Given the consolidation of power in his hands, the goals of Hafiz al-Asad are perhaps the single most important immediate determinant of Syrian foreign policy. Asad's challenge has been to balance the residual revisionism deriving from Syria's historical experience and role-conception with the realities of Syria's limited power resources and its geographical vulnerability. He has done so with considerable success: while before his rise to power, Syria was largely the passive victim of stronger forces, Asad made it a major actor in the regional environment (Maoz 1988:ix–x). Foreign policy-making in Syria approximates in key ways the rational actor model, namely, that of a unified leadership sufficiently autonomous of domestic constraints to be able to pursue foreign policy rationally. Such rationality is evident in three features of Asad's foreign policy.

- 1 Consistency in pursuit of realistic and limited goals arguably reflective of the 'national interest' and compatible with available means. The radical Ba'thists had advocated a war of popular liberation in which the Arab masses, armies and oil would be totally mobilized for the struggle against Israel and Western interests in the area. Asad had no illusions that this messianic strategy could succeed but was quite aware of the costs, particularly in terms of Israeli reprisals, which sponsoring such a war would inflict on Syria. During the intra-Ba'th power struggle of 1969–1970, his 'realism' contrasted with the willingness of the Ba'th radicals to put ideology above the calculus of power. On coming to power in 1970, Asad scaled down Syria's objectives, discarding revisionism for the realistic, if still ambitious, goal of recovering the occupied territories under the terms of the 'land for peace' UN Resolutions 242 and 338. He aimed to reverse the hegemonic position Israel acquired in the Mashreq in the 1967 war by rolling it back to and containing it within its pre-1967 borders (Diab 1994:77–81; Seale 1992; Seeyle 1993:105–106). The triumph of *realpolitik* over revisionism has been evident in Asad's actual behaviour: his opposition to the radicals' 1970 intervention against King Hussein, his *détente* with the traditional pro-Western Arab states, the limited objectives of the 1973 war and his unconcern to annex Lebanon even after Syria established hegemony there. Asad's stand in the 1990–1991 war against Iraq shows that, far from being a pan-Arab revolutionary, he is a backer of the regional *status quo* who pursues such limited and conventional goals as recovery of territorial losses and a stable balance of power. On the other hand, Asad demonstrated great tenacity in pursuit of his scaled-down strategic goals. His record suggests he was a nationalist unwilling to concede basic Arab rights; indeed, he wanted to be viewed as an Arab nationalist leader of Nasser's stature. Thus, while accepting a comprehensive peaceful settlement with Israel, he stubbornly refused to follow other Arab parties which accepted less than full and comprehensive Israeli withdrawal. When the balance of forces did not permit achievement of key goals, Asad preferred to work for a change in that balance rather than abandon the goals. When vital interests were at stake he was prepared to stand up to superior external power and proved to have a cool nerve not easily panicked; this is best illustrated by his very risky resistance to the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord at a time when Israeli and American power was projected right on his 'Lebanese doorstep'. Asad has pursued his agenda with remarkable consistency for a quarter of a century regardless of internal political vagaries or economic constraints (Seale 1988:494).

- 2 Matching means to ends. Simultaneous to scaling down Syria's goals, Asad greatly upgraded its capabilities. A realist, convinced that power is what counts in international politics, he consistently sought to build up Syria's military power, aiming at 'strategic parity' with Israel. His diplomacy was conditioned by the belief that a stable peace with Israel could only be built on a balance of power with it. An ability to deter an Israeli attack was not only the heart of national security but essential to a credible Syrian bargaining hand in negotiations over a settlement; arguably, Asad may also have sought the capability to make a tacit but credible threat that war was possible in the absence of a satisfactory peace (Khalidi and Agha 1991). In inter-Arab politics, Asad aimed to establish Syria's pre-eminence as the main defender of Arab interests against Israel (Seale 1988:492–495). While maximizing Syrian power, Asad also used that power like a prudent rational actor, carefully weighing the balance of forces before acting; a particular, he refused to be drawn into a war with Israel when the balance of power was disadvantageous. He deployed the most economic means possible to attain his goals, a characteristic most evident in his measured use of proxies in Lebanon to counter threats such as the Lebanese-Israeli accord and to pressure Israel in the south (*ibid.*: 366–420).
- 3 Great tactical flexibility in adapting strategies to threats and opportunities in the international arena. Asad proved himself a master of adapting a mix of foreign policy instruments—limited war, alliance formation, negotiations—parleying limited resources into greater influence over outcomes than would be expected from Syria's base of national power. Because Syria alone lacked the resources to sustain its policy of recovering the occupied territories, Asad put a high priority on manipulating alliances, regardless of ideology, which would allow him to mobilize the resources of other states behind his goals. He believed Israel could be pushed back to the 1967 lines only by the threat or action of a Soviet-backed Arab war coalition or a pan-Arab diplomacy which diluted US support for Israeli occupation. Equally important, he had to prevent other Arab actors from pursuing separate tracks in the Arab-Israeli conflict which threatened Syria's strategy and leadership in the Arab arena while deterring the USA from promoting projects which ignored Syrian interests. As such, Syria had to manipulate both the regional and global systems. Asad was always prepared to adapt his strategy to make the best of changing and usually unfavourable conditions: he pursued limited war in alliance with Egypt, participated in the US-brokered peace negotiations (in which he proved to be a tenacious bargainer) when conditions for an agreement appeared favourable and obstructed them when he could not negotiate from a position of strength. Asad was also

willing to eschew the path of least resistance and pursue policies which were unpopular at home if they served his view of *raison d'état*—such as the alliance with Iran. Unlike Sadat, who allowed domestic politics and economic vulnerabilities to force a peace agreement to Israel's advantage, Asad worked, with considerable success, to sufficiently insulate himself from such factors that his decisions could be taken chiefly in response to external threats and opportunities.

To argue that Asad's policy approached the standards of a rational actor is not to insist that his decisions were always right; indeed, there is some evidence of apparent irrationality in Asad's conduct which must qualify the image drawn above. Personal conflicts with Yasir Arafat helped Israel divide Syria and the PLO to the disadvantage of both. Personal rivalries with Saddam Hussein may have been a factor in the failure to sustain the alliance with Iraq needed for the eastern front.

ASAD'S STRATEGY IN ACTION

Asad's policy can be best seen in action in the two related arenas where Syria's interests were most at stake. First, Asad sought to mobilize power for the conflict with Israel by manipulating the regional and global systems; second, he sought hegemony in Lebanon which had become a main arena in which the struggle with Israel took place.

The conflict with Israel

The main thrust of Asad's initial policy after coming to power was preparation for a conventional war to retake the Golan from Israel. He therefore struck a strategic alliance with Sadat's Egypt, the most militarily powerful of the Arab states which shared Syria's interest in recovery of the occupied territories. Asad believed that when Syria and Egypt were united the Arabs could prevail, and when they were split they were weak and vulnerable to outside powers. To acquire the necessary arms Asad maintained Syria's close alliance with the USSR but also forged new alliances with the Arab oil states, repudiated the ideological cold war with them carried on by the radical Ba' thists, and won in return a growing subsidization of his military build-up. Despite political conflicts with Jordan and Iraq, he also tried to include them, with mixed success, in an anti-Israeli eastern front essential to protect Syria's southeastern flank (Kerr 1975; Petran 1972:239–257).

This strategy prepared the way for Syria's joint attack with Egypt on Israeli forces in the Sinai and on the Golan. Evidence of the limited nature of Syrian goals in this war was the fact that Syrian forces attacking into the

Golan made no attempt, where they had the opportunity, of advancing into Israel itself (Maoz 1988:90; Wakebridge 1976:27). When Syria failed to recover the Golan militarily but seemed to acquire enhanced political leverage from its credible challenge to the pro-Israeli *status quo*, Asad entered the Kissinger-sponsored negotiations with Israel. The resulting 1974 Golan disengagement agreement with Israel has been scrupulously observed ever since. However, Sadat's subsequent separate deals with Israel undermined Syrian diplomatic leverage, shattered the Syrian-Egyptian alliance and knocked Syria out of the peace process (Seale 1988:185–315; Sheehan 1976).

In place of the Egyptian alliance, Asad tried to build up a Levant bloc which would bring Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians into Damascus's orbit, prevent separate dealing by them, enhance Syria's diplomatic weight and provide some military security against Israeli outflanking movements. From this base, Asad made a bid for Arab leadership as Syria's main rivals were marginalized—Egypt by its separate peace with Israel and Iraq by its war with Iran (Maoz 1988:113–134).

Once Syria abandoned the peace process, Asad's policy aimed to prevent the legitimization of the Camp David process in the Arab world and at claiming the Arab support to which Syria was entitled as the main remaining frontline Arab state. Priority was given to a military build-up aimed at achieving parity with Israel: the threat of an Israel emboldened by the neutralization of its southern front had to be contained and successful peace negotiations, Asad now insisted, depended on restoration of a more favourable Arab-Israeli power balance. Syrian policy became what might be called 'tactical rejectionist': until Syria achieved military 'parity' with Israel, Damascus would obstruct all attempts at partial or separate Israeli agreements with other states that tried to circumvent it (Drysdale and Hinnebusch 1991:129–135; Seale 1988:344–350).

Syria operated at the global as well as the regional system and successfully exploited superpower rivalries to develop capabilities well beyond its own slim resource base. The alliance with the USSR was crucial to Asad's strategy; arms deliveries were key to Syria's relative success in the 1973 war and thereafter in the drive for parity. Its role as patron-protector had a deterrent effect on Israel's freedom of action against Syria; tacit Soviet commitments to defend Syria were crucial in giving Asad the confidence to challenge Israeli and American power in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion (Cobban 1991:112–138; Drysdale and Hinnebusch 1991:149–174; Ramet 1990).

While relations with the USA, Israel's backer, were uneasy, Syria sought to exploit US fears of Middle East instability in order to get pressure on Israel to withdraw from the lands taken in 1967 and to check Israeli military

threats. Kissinger's mediation of the Golan Heights disengagement negotiations temporarily brought Syria into the US-sponsored Middle East peace process. US mediation more than once proved its value in keeping Syrian-Israeli rivalry in Lebanon from escalating out of control. But, US-Syrian relations soured over the US policy of keeping Israel militarily stronger and dividing the Arab world through separate settlements and, under Reagan, of treating Syria as a Soviet surrogate to be punished. Asad sought to demonstrate that a peace essential to regional stability could not succeed in disregard of Syrian interests. The US-Syrian showdown over the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord brought the two countries to the brink of war, but the failure of American military power to prevail seemed to make Asad's point. Syria subsequently tried to use its 'good offices' in obtaining the release of Western hostages in Lebanon to make a similar point: that with its cooperation US interests could be served (Drysdale and Hinnebusch 1991:174-199; Maoz 1988:135-148).

Asad's transformation of Syria into the main Arab front in the conflict with Israel enabled him to make a claim on subsidies from the Arab oil states with which he made Syria a formidable military power. So reinforced, he was able to demonstrate that if Syria could not impose an Arab-Israeli peace to its liking, it could prevent one which damaged its interests or Arab rights: that seemed to be the lesson of the collapse of both the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord and of the 1985 Hussein-Arafat collaboration over the Reagan plan. But this was purely negative power and in the process Syria antagonized a multitude of Arab and Western powers and isolated itself. Throughout much of the 1980s Syria was largely lacking in the diplomatic leverage which could flow from its leadership of a wider Arab bloc and was left to its own devices during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Nevertheless, buttressed by a credible military deterrent and his alliance with Iran, Asad remained stubbornly 'steadfast' throughout the 1980s against what he considered to be capitulation to Israel.

Syrian policy in Lebanon and the Palestinians

Lebanon became a main arena of conflict between Syria and Israel once the post-1973 peace process stalled. Syrian involvement in Lebanon was chiefly a major part of Asad's post-Camp David bid to lead a Levant coalition of neighbouring states which shared with Syria the insecurities of a border with Israel, a stake in rolling back the Israeli occupation, and the common heritage of Bilad al-Sham. This alliance would both guard against Israeli military flank attacks on Syria through Lebanon and Jordan and deter attempts by any of the parties to pursue separate negotiations with Israel. Lebanon was a special danger spot, particularly vulnerable, because

of its civil war and the Palestinian presence, to Israeli military and political penetration. Given the PLO presence there, Lebanon was also key to Asad's drive to control the 'Palestinian card': Syria's bargaining leverage in the Arab-Israeli conflict would be greatly enhanced if it enjoyed the capacity to veto any settlement of the Palestinian problem which left Syria out or to 'deliver' the Palestinians into an acceptable settlement; whoever controlled Lebanon was in a strong position to control the PLO. While Syria's policy towards the Palestinians and Lebanon may have been conditioned by its view of them as fallen away parts of Greater Syria, it was most immediately determined by Asad's strategy in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Syria's 1976 intervention in Lebanon was most immediately motivated by the grave security *threat* from the prospect that civil war and partition would open the door to Israeli penetration, but the conflict also presented an *opportunity* for Damascus to insert itself as arbiter and draw Lebanon under its politico-military wing. Syria tried to both constrain and exploit the crisis. In its early interventions (from 1975 to early 1976) Syria bolstered its traditional allies, the Palestinian-Muslim 'Left' camp, against a Maronite 'Right' drive for expansion and partition. It imposed an end to the fighting and sponsored reforms meant to appease each side: a mild redistribution of power in the Muslims' favour, Palestinian respect for Lebanese sovereignty. But when Syria's own allies rejected its reforms in the name of a secular radical state and appeared intent on a military defeat of the Maronites, Syria perceived potential new security threats. In 1976 Syria intervened with greater force and against its former allies to prevent a Maronite defeat. Asad was well aware of efforts on the Maronite Right to draw Israel into the fighting on its behalf and feared the conflict would throw the Christians into the hands of Israel and balkanize Lebanon. As the Palestinians defied him, Asad determined to deprive the PLO of the autonomous Lebanese stronghold from which it could evade Syria's pressures for strategic 'coordination' and embark on initiatives threatening its strategy and security. In particular, Asad sought to prevent the emergence of a 'rejectionist' Palestinian-dominated Lebanon, aligned with Iraq, sponsoring guerrilla war against Israel and giving the latter an excuse to evade peace pressures. Syria itself could not readily pursue what opportunities remained in the peace process when sandwiched between rejectionist Iraq and an equally rejectionist Palestinian-dominated Lebanon. Moreover, this scenario would give Israel an excuse to intervene militarily in Lebanon; not only might it realize its supposed historic ambition to seize southern Lebanon, but an Israeli drive through the Bekaa Valley to split Syria and encircle Damascus was by no means implausible. Personal ties to and animosities towards Lebanese leaders, fear that sectarian strife could spill across the border and outrage at the defiance of his own allies were added motives for Asad's

intervention. Asad had no intention of incorporating Lebanon, but he was determined to assert an exclusive sphere of influence there and to position his army in the Bekaa Valley to guard Syria's western flank (Chalala 1985; Dawisha 1980; Deeb 1980:122–128).

Once resistance from the Palestinian-Left camp was smashed, Asad set out to reconstruct a reformed, less sectarian Lebanese state under Syrian tutelage and bound to his diplomacy. The Maronites, however, now resisted Syrian penetration of their domains and reconstruction of the central government and set about forging a Christian canton in the mountains and in East Beirut. They also sought expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon as against Syria's desire for a controlled Palestinian presence in the south. When the Maronites collaborated with Israel in carving out a southern enclave meant to seal the border, Syria threw its support to Palestinian-Leftist forces resisting this project, but stood by when Israel's 1978 invasion consolidated its Maronite-dominated 'security zone'. Syria's subsequent military drives to punish the Maronites pushed them back in central Lebanon, but, deterred by Israel, it could not bring them to heel and only cemented their Israeli connection. Two Maronite enclaves, overtly aligned with Israel, emerged as stubborn obstacles to the reconstruction of a united Lebanon and threats to Syrian security (Haddad 1982).

Israel, now under Begin, upgraded its alliance with the Maronites and began looking for a way to expel Syria from Lebanon. In 1981, a Maronite bid to extend their control into the Syrian-held Bekaa Valley, cut Syrian access to Beirut and draw Israel deep into Lebanon almost succeeded. Syria pushed the Maronites back but the Israeli airforce intervened on their behalf. Syria moved anti-aircraft missiles into eastern Lebanon, Israel threatened to destroy them and the USA intervened to restrain Israel and defuse the 'missile crisis'. But Israel, as much as Syria, had become the arbiter of Lebanon. Syria's own actions—first weakening its own allies, strengthening a Maronite Right whose interests were incompatible with Syria's, then pushing the Maronites into the Israeli embrace—helped bring about what it most feared.

Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon represented an Israeli attempt to achieve hegemony in Lebanon at Syria's expense. Encouraged by growing Arab fragmentation and the neutralization of its front with Egypt, Israel aimed at smashing the PLO, expelling Syria from Lebanon and demolishing resistance to Camp David. Militarily, Syria took a beating, and although Syrian forces extracted a price from Israel and stubbornly refused, as Israel expected, to retreat from Lebanon, Israel inflicted large losses and pushed Syria from strategic sectors of Lebanese terrain, including the nerve centre, Beirut. Moreover, it expelled the PLO from Lebanon and in the wake of the war an American-Israeli *combinazione* tried to impose a

Maronite client regime in Beirut and a virtual peace treaty on Israeli terms. The 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord would have opened Lebanon to Israeli influence, military forces, and products, outlawed Arab forces on Lebanese soil and effaced its Arab character. Israeli withdrawal was made contingent on Syria's, putting Syria's role on an equal footing with Israel's. The USA and Israel believed a militarily weakened and isolated Syria had no choice but to accept the accord and withdraw or face continued Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Yet Syria chose to defy their overwhelming military power and in a short time brought about a remarkable turnaround in the balance of forces. Syria refused to withdraw and took advantage of the growing resentment of Lebanese Muslims against Israeli and Maronite domination to strike an alliance with them. Buttressed by Syria, Muslim militias, notably Shi'ite and Druze forces, unleashed a guerrilla war against Israeli occupation forces. They also checked the Maronite Gemayel government's consolidation of power over the country, and even the intervention of American guns and planes on its behalf could not deter them. Israel, wearied by the casualties of Lebanese occupation and aware of the risks of a renewed drive against a Syrian army much reinforced by Soviet arms and backing, chose to withdraw from Lebanon, although it maintained its 'South Lebanese Army' proxy in the southern 'security zone'. Asad rightly calculated that when Israel's own security was not at risk it would not pursue a war of attrition costing continual casualties. The bombing of US Marine positions and the downing of American bombers flying against Syrian forces demonstrated to the USA the costs of involvement and brought about its withdrawal, too. The weakened Maronite government was forced to annul the accord with Israel. Thus, through a shrewd use of proxies, steadfastness under threat and Soviet backing, Asad snatched victory from the jaws of defeat (Petran 1987:295-348; Rabinovich 1985; Schiff and Yaari 1984).

Asad turned his attention to the PLO even as he was confronting Israel and the West. Arafat resisted Syria's claim to control the 'Palestinian card', and refused to burn his bridges to Egypt, undermining Syria's drive to prevent the legitimization of Camp David. To Arafat, Syria claimed a kind of protectorate over the PLO, but failed to assume the responsibilities incumbent on this role, notably to defend the PLO in southern Lebanon during the Israeli invasion. In a major threat to Syria, Arafat and Jordan began to explore the Reagan plan, a warmed over version of Camp David-style autonomy for the West Bank. Making no provision for the Golan, it seemed to Damascus a second prong of the Israeli-American offensive developing against it in Lebanon in 1983. When rebellion broke out inside the PLO against Arafat, in good part for his flirtations with Jordan, Egypt and the Reagan plan, Syria saw a golden opportunity to depose him and

reshape a pro-Syrian PLO. Yet this only pushed him into the arms of Syria's rivals: Arafat's subsequent visit to Cairo was a first step in breaking Egypt's Arab isolation after Camp David. Nor could Arafat be stopped from continuing to explore peace negotiations in partnership with King Hussein. In the 'War of the Camps' the Syrian-backed Shi'ite Amal sought to prevent Arafat's return to Lebanon and uproot his remaining power there. However, fighting Palestinians vitiated Syria's status as the champion of the Arab national cause, the role which was the basis of Asad's claim on the support and cooperation of other Arab states. The Syrian-sponsored Palestinian National Salvation Front made up of various radical splinter groups did not become a credible alternative to Arafat's PLO (Hinnebusch 1986; Petran 1987:335–377).

Syria also found reconstructing a stable pro-Syrian Lebanon an elusive goal. Though the Maronites were gravely weakened after 1983, Syria could find no leader able to deliver their cooperation. At the Lausanne conference in 1984, the Maronite zuama rejected a modest redistribution of power to the Muslims, President Amin Gemayel similarly proved an unreliable partner, and when a Maronite militia leader, Elie Hobeika, accepted a Syrian reform plan—the 'Tripartite Agreement'—the Maronite community revolted, preferring cantonization to equalization and Syrian tutelage. Syria's position was further complicated when its post-1983 conflict with Arafat's PLO began to split the pro-Syrian Muslim camp and the radical Islamic Hizbollah challenged Syria's project for a secular Lebanon. The Asad regime's legitimacy was also threatened by the service it and Amal seemed to be doing Israel in the 'War of the Camps' against Palestinian fighters. The failure of Syria's 1988 attempt to make election of a new Maronite president conditional on Christian acceptance of reform left Lebanon divided between two rival governments; a sign of Syria's declining control was the 1989 attempt of the Maronite general, Michel Aoun, to challenge its very presence in Lebanon. Lebanon's growing fragmentation and armed mobilization made it seemingly ungovernable while Israel prevented Syria from using its military power to impose a solution (Harris 1985; Petran 1987:345–369).

However, the 1989 Taif accord, expressive of Lebanon's weariness with anarchy, legitimized Syria's role and inter-Maronite fighting enervated its enemies. Then, the preoccupation of Aoun's Israeli and Iraqi backers with the 1990 Kuwait crisis and a US green light following Syria's adhesion to the anti-Iraq coalition, permitted Asad to defeat Aoun militarily and impose a Pax Syrianna. The May 1991 Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Friendship attempted to institutionalize Syrian control over Lebanese foreign and security policies (*Asharq al-Awsat* in MEM 21 December 1993; *al-Hayat* in MEM 18 January 1994;

MEM 19 April 1994; *L'Orient-Le Jour* in MEM 17, 21 January 1994; *al-Safir* in MEM 30 March 1994).

If Syria's intervention in Lebanon is driven primarily by strategic motives, it has since acquired other interests there. The Bekaa drug trade temporarily provided a certain alternative to petro-rent for servicing the regime's military constituency but has since been repressed at American demand (CSM 8 November 1995; NR 15 November 1993). Syria hopes to harness Lebanese entrepreneurship to complement, rather than compete with, its own economic liberalization. Vice-President Khaddam, Asad's viceroy in charge of Lebanon, has promoted 'a modest experiment in economic integration' between the Syrian and Lebanese private sectors as a way of countering Israel's penetration of the Middle East as an agent of Western multinational corporations at the expense of Lebanon's historic economic role; without Syrian backing for a stable state in Lebanon, he declared, economic recovery could not proceed (*al-Hayat* in MEM 14 January 1994).

MILITARY EXPANSION AND ECONOMIC STAGNATION

Syria's military capabilities have continually expanded. The rudimentary army at independence grew under Ba'th rule into a 75,000-strong force equipped with 450 tanks and 140 combat aircraft; but, owing to politicization of the officer corps, it rapidly collapsed in the face of Israel's 1967 seizure of the Golan. It was Asad's post-1967 ability to balance his Soviet alliance (to get arms) with ties to the conservative Arab oil states (which provided the financial resources) that made for a sustained military build-up going well beyond Syria's capacity to support.

Asad's rebuilding of the army along more professional lines paid off in a performance during the 1973 war which was enough to help (with Egypt) upset an intolerable *status quo* in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The military balance between Israel and Syria has historically been a component of a larger balance between Israel and a potential Arab war coalition. In 1973, the Egyptian-Syrian war coalition was the heart of this balance, though Iraq also contributed to it. But, as Egypt's peace treaty and Iraq's war with Iran took them out of this coalition, Syria was left alone facing Israel and at a quantitative as well as a qualitative disadvantage; the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon reinforced Syria's security fears. Asad's response was a determination to acquire 'strategic parity'. Re-equipped and expanded after the 1982 war, the armed forces had by 1986 5,000 tanks, 650 combat planes, including 200 high performance aircraft, and 102 missile batteries, along with 500,000 men organized in two army corps made up of nine mechanized or armoured divisions with their own artillery and air defence. A new Soviet-supplied long-range air umbrella was in place and some 400

ballistic missiles (including accurate SS-21s) gave Syria a new capacity to hit targets, such as mobilization centres, in the Israeli hinterland. A developing chemical/biological weapons capability became part of Syria's deterrent. A 500,000-strong reserve force suggested Syria was approaching the total mobilization achieved by Israel. An Israeli attack on Syria was likely, given this balance of forces, to be very costly, with no guarantee that Syria could be defeated. In terms at least of defence, the Syrian army has become a formidable force. Since 1973 it has a record of tenacity which has consistently denied Israel a knockout blow. But Syria lacks a credible offensive capability against Israel; although a surprise attack might still seize the Golan, the conditions under which Syria might hold this territory against Israeli counter-attack have not existed for two decades (Levron 1987; Raviv 1981; Sayigh 1990:15).

Military capability and economic development are linked in Syria as elsewhere. Syria's economy is too slim to support its foreign policy and military ambitions and therefore remains a key domestic constraint on policy options. While sustained bursts of growth widened and diversified Syria's economic base of national power, its industrial and technological capacity remained limited and inferior to Israel's. State domination of the economy did, however, harness national resources to foreign policy goals: 15–17 per cent of GNP and almost a third of public expenditure were devoted to defence in the 1970s and 1980s and 20 per cent of manpower served in the armed forces. But development and consumption also made claims on limited resources and the regime was unwilling or unable to pay the political costs of extracting the resources through taxes. The resulting resources gap led to growing Syrian dependence on external aid and loans, chiefly from Middle East oil countries, the Soviet bloc and Western Europe. According to Clawson, from 1977–1988, Syria self-financed only 45 per cent of imports, the remaining US\$42 billion being covered by grants and loans from the USSR (US\$23 billion), the GCC states (US\$12 billion), Iran (US\$3 billion) and the West (US\$4 billion) (Clawson 1989; *WSJ* 9 August 1989). Only the diversification of this dependence eased the constraints it puts on Syria's policy options. By the 1980s the growing resource demands of the national security state had become a heavy burden on the economy which helped bring growth to a halt. Meanwhile, external aid declined (Arab aid may have fallen by one- to two-thirds of the US\$1.8 billion received in 1978) while the Soviet military debt burgeoned. The decline of Arab aid in the 1980s led to balance of payments and foreign currency crises and economic stagnation.

The immediate result of economic constraints was a levelling off of Syria's military build-up. Economic problems did not otherwise force a foreign policy change, however. Though the economy was under maximum

pressure in the 1980s, Asad refused to change his policies in Lebanon and his alliance with Iran to please his GCC donors. The potential constraints on foreign policy from the regime's dependency was eased by the diversification of Syria's donors and its ability to balance between rival Soviet and East European, West European, Arab Gulf and Iranian sources of aid; foreign policies that alienated one donor might win rewards from the other. Although he has exploited foreign policy to win economic relief—this was a factor in joining the anti-Iraq coalition—Asad had no record of taking foreign policy decisions for economic reasons which would not otherwise have been taken on strategic grounds (Diab 1994:87; Lukas 1991).

It might be argued that the role of rational actor seemingly detached from constraints was an abnormality which could not be indefinitely sustained and depended on certain temporary conditions such as high oil prices and inexpensive Soviet arms on credit. But, in the short run, the regime found various safety valves which allowed it to maintain a huge army and resist economic pressures to abandon its foreign policy. Indicative of its autonomy was its ability to enforce austerity measures which shaved populist benefits and required the demobilization of certain military units. Limited liberalization of foreign trade encouraged the private sector to pick up some of the economic slack, while new oil revenues and, evidently, the profits of the Bekaa Valley narcotics trade which filled the pockets of key regime constituents, if not the treasury (*NR* 45 (22), 15 November 1993), all relieved, at various points, mounting economic pressures on policy.

SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The Asad regime's adhesion to the anti-Iraq coalition and its entry into the peace talks with Israel after the war appear to represent a major transformation in Syria's foreign policy. In fact, the change was initially an alteration in strategy rather than a change in objectives. Nevertheless, this alteration is sufficiently significant to provide an opportunity to further dissect the determinants of Syrian foreign policy.

While the Asad regime had long been under internal pressures from economic stagnation, this did not translate into a change in foreign policy and, in fact, Syria had weathered the economic crisis prior to the major decisions of the 1990s. The economic crisis had forced openings to the private sector which was increasingly co-opted into the regime coalition at the same time as austerity was damaging the regime's original 'populist' constituency. Nevertheless, the regime continued to balance, Bonapartist fashion, above social forces and therefore remained autonomous of any

particular constituency. The same cross-class coalition forged in the 1970s largely persisted and foreign policy alteration was not associated with any major change in the regime's social base. As such, largely manageable internal pressures did not constrain Syrian foreign policy's ability to rationally respond to external factors (Faksh 1993; Hinnebusch 1993).

If internal change was incremental, sudden and radical changes were taking place in the regional and international balance of power and foreign policy responded immediately to these external threats and opportunities. Most important was the rapidly declining Syrian ability to exploit the bipolar world. The end of superpower rivalry under Gorbachev enervated Syria's value to Moscow and its willingness to back its drive for parity and extend its military protection. With the collapse of Soviet power, Asad realized that tactical rejectionism was exhausted. Simultaneously, Syria's Arab strategy had isolated it in the Arab world by 1990. It was estranged from Egypt; its attempts to dominate the Levant precipitated conflicts with Jordan, the PLO and Lebanese Maronites; its Iranian alignment alienated the moderate Gulf Arab states and Iraq. As long as Egypt and Iraq remained on the Arab peripheries, Syria's inter-Arab weight remained formidable. But Egypt progressively inched out of its isolation. In 1988, Iraq, Syria's main Arab rival, emerged unexpectedly strengthened from the war with Iran, began to support Maronite defiance of Syria in Lebanon and to assert leadership, at Syria's expense, in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab Cooperation Council of 1989, which excluded Syria and aligned Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Yemen (and informally) Saudi Arabia and the PLO in favour of peace negotiations, seemed to represent the dominant Arab axis after the Iran-Iraq war. Syria seemed to forfeit to this moderate coalition its claim to a protectorate over the 'Arab cause'. Syria's Soviet ally openly backed the 1988 PLO 'peace offensive' in which Arafat recognized Israel and the USA prepared to circumvent Syrian objections to it (Armanazi 1993:112-113).

By 1989, Asad was being forced to make the tactical retreats necessary to make Syria a part of rather than a victim of the emerging Arab consensus. The first major expression of Asad's adaptation was reconciliation with Egypt on Cairo's terms—i.e., acceptance of its separate peace. This was meant both to balance the Iraqi threat and possibly to use Cairo's good offices with the US to soften American efforts to isolate Syria (Diab 1994:82-83). These events seemed to show that Syria, having neither the wealth or population of rival Arab centres such as Egypt and Iraq, could only bid for Arab leadership when they were neutralized and that a rational Syrian policy had to adapt itself to the changed power balance caused by their re-emergence as weighty regional players.

Syria in the second Gulf war

If the Egyptian *rapprochement* was the first major sign of change in Syrian foreign policy, the second was Asad's adherence to the US-led anti-Iraq coalition. This radical departure from traditional nationalist policy illustrated Asad's combination of consistent goals and tactical flexibility. His decision flowed in part from tactical opportunities to weaken his arch-rival, Saddam Hussein, and win financial subsidies for Syria's troubled economy. However, these factors are, by themselves, totally inadequate to explain Asad's policy. Economic constraints had been resisted successfully throughout the 1980s. In the larger picture, of course, Syria had long depended on Saudi economic support which, Asad must have realized, would become all the more important as ties with the Eastern bloc slackened. He undoubtedly came under some pressure to reciprocate the Saudi's support for Syria against Israel by standing with them in their hour of need; otherwise Syria risked future loss of Saudi aid whether Riyadh was alienated or brought under Iraqi influence. The crisis was a perfect opportunity to revitalize the GCC subsidy channel. None of this means that Syria sought to sell foreign policy decisions for economic rent.

Nor was Syrian-Iraq rivalry sufficient to explain Asad's decision. To be sure, Saddam Hussein was hostile and had an enormous army; he had demonstrated a reckless disregard for the legitimacy of established borders, and Syria shared a long border with Iraq. Yet there is no history of military confrontation between the two states, and a military attack on the other would enjoy no legitimacy in either state. Moreover, after the invasion of Kuwait Saddam was preoccupied with his southern front and posed a lesser threat to Syria than previously. Since Syria's joining the coalition could conceivably have provoked Saddam to turn some of his forces against Syria, it would have been safer for Syria to remain neutral and to bet on the West containing whatever military threat Saddam offered.

The threat from Iraq was, in fact, chiefly political. If Iraq succeeded in annexing Kuwait (and, by intimidating Saudi Arabia, in potentially wielding the oil weapon), it would be in a stronger position to claim Arab leadership in the conflict with Israel at Syria's expense. The invasion itself was part of an Iraqi bid, apparent at the 1990 Baghdad summit, to assume Arab leadership through a more confrontationist stance towards the West over Israel. Syria could not permit any other state to dictate decisions which could lead it into a war with Israel or entrap it in a peace settlement it found unacceptable. Asad certainly feared that the Iraqi invasion could unleash a wider war which Israel could exploit to attack Syria, and joining the coalition was a kind of insurance against that. He must have welcomed the possibility that defeat in war or the humiliation of withdrawal from Kuwait would bring the Iraqi regime down.

Nevertheless, the political risk in joining the coalition was high. Standing with the West against a fellow Arab nationalist state did serious damage to Syria's Arab nationalist legitimacy, an intangible but crucial asset from which Syria traditionally made its claim on the Arab support needed to sustain its policy towards Israel. It could, thus, have actually increased the potential political threat from Iraq. The actions of the coalition also damaged Arab assets Asad needed in the struggle with Israel. The Western intervention brought Arab oil resources—potential leverage in any peace process—under seemingly direct Western control; indeed, Asad justified his participation in the coalition on the paradoxical (and not very convincing) grounds of making sure the intervention of his Western coalition partners did not turn into permanent unilateral occupation of the Persian Gulf. The outcome of a crisis in which Arabs fought each other and their military power was thus dissipated would tip the military power balance further in Israel's favour. As such, rivalry with and threats from Iraq produced, in itself, no compelling cost-benefit calculus favouring adhesion to the coalition.

In fact, Syria's policy was strategically shaped by a wider change in the balance of power than that produced by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, namely, the breakdown of the bipolar world which was simultaneously taking place. By the 1990s the withdrawal of the USSR as a reliable patron-protector and arms supplier deprived Syria of the option of a credible threat of war in the absence of an acceptable peace: how would hundreds of tanks lost in the war be replaced or Israeli advances stopped without the threat of Soviet intervention? Anti-Israeli brinksmanship of the type Asad had practised in Lebanon in the 1980s had become too dangerous without Soviet protection. Syria was also left dangerously vulnerable to Western animosity for its obstruction of the peace process and, particularly, its alleged resort to terrorism in the 1980s, which Israel could exploit to launch an attack.

An exposed Syria had no choice but to repair and diversify its connections to other powers. In particular, Asad understood that he could not realize his goals in opposition to the remaining American superpower. Syrian policy would henceforth have to rely on diplomacy instead of military threats, and that meant *détente* with the USA which alone had leverage over Israel. Asad needed to get the USA to accept Syria as the key to peace and stability in the Middle East, as a state whose interests had to be recognized. The Gulf war presented a golden opportunity to trade membership in the coalition—to the credibility of which Syria's nationalist credentials were arguably crucial (Armanazi 1993:114)—in return for American acknowledgement of Syrian interests. Asad's gamble was that after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was resolved, the USA would have to fulfil promises to its Arab allies and resolve the Israeli occupation of Arab lands

in a comparable way—on the basis of UN resolutions. As Khaddam put it, if parity with Israel could no longer be achieved through Soviet support for Syria, an alternative means could be reduced US commitment to Israeli hegemony (*MEI* 30 August 1991). Assured there were no plans for a permanent US presence in the region and that post-war security would be in the hands of Arab forces, Asad also gambled that participation in the coalition would give Syria a role in filling the power vacuum once American forces withdrew. Of crucial importance to Damascus, joining the coalition provided the opportunity to achieving hegemony in Lebanon, thus allowing it to ‘play the Lebanon card’ in inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Finally, as the Eastern Bloc disappeared as a source of markets, aid and technology, Asad realized that Syria would have to repair economic links with the West frayed during the 1980s over the terrorism issue. In short, Syria saw the New World Order shaping up and wanted to influence it rather than be its victim (Diab 1994:82–83; Kienle 1994:384–385, 392–393). The Gulf war promised to be a watershed event in the birth of that order and Syria’s policy in the conflict would determine its status in the New Order. The decision was in Asad’s tradition of seizing opportunities to enhance Syria’s power position by turning defeat (Soviet collapse) into victory (realignment towards the USA).

Syria also tried to take advantage of the war to situate itself at the centre of a reinvigorated Arab security system. The proposed Damascus Declaration, in which Egypt and Syria would guarantee Gulf security in return for economic aid, was ostensibly an attempt to remedy the manifest failure of Arab collective security. According to Syria, the Arabs had to take responsibility for their own security if they were to avoid foreign intervention. The Damascus Declaration, Foreign Minister Shara’a declared, ‘would constitute a basis for more comprehensive Arab security and a starting point for joint Arab action’. The new alliance allowed ‘Arab power and Arab wealth to join forces for the interests of the Arabs’ (*SWB* 20 February, 7 March 1991). If the notion of pan-Arab national security was to make sense, the Arab Gulf states had to be kept from looking exclusively to the West for their security. Syria’s bid for a share of responsibility for Arab and Gulf security would hardly be credible if it did not make a tangible troop contribution to the anti-Iraq coalition.

Syria’s participation in the coalition seems to validate, as no decision before, the regime’s relative autonomy from domestic constraints. The Syrian public was initially divided and ambivalent over the crisis. Although disapproving of the invasion, Syrians agreed Kuwait did not deserve to hoard ‘Arab’ oil wealth. Saddam had violated another Arab state but joining a Western juggernaut against a fellow nationalist state like Iraq was, for many, a worst sin against Arabism. As the full dimensions of Western

intervention unfolded, Syrians became increasingly pro-Iraq. While they were sceptical of Saddam's motives and critical of a strategy which split the Arabs and put Iraq at risk, they believed the Western intervention was on Israel's behalf and aimed to seize control of Arab oil. The Iraqi Scud attacks, which evoked pride in Arab power to inflict hurt on Israel, made Saddam a hero for many. This sentiment cut across political fault lines, embracing Ba'thists and Islamists, bourgeoisie and peasants.

As such, Asad's stand in the Kuwait war seriously risked regime legitimacy. In his speech justifying his decision, he admitted that the Arab masses had been swayed against the foreign intervention but declared that strategic interests, not emotions isolated from knowledge, had to govern policy-making. Given their ambivalence and the all-pervasiveness of the repressive apparatus, few Syrians risked overt opposition. There were some demonstrations in eastern Syria where family and economic ties to Iraq are strong; anti-regime pamphlets circulated and Syrian intellectuals signed a petition against participation in the coalition. Islamic opinion was pro-Iraq but, since the repression of the Islamic uprising at Hama, Islamic activists were in no position to challenge the regime. That Asad had been able successfully to fly in the face of public opinion on several previous occasions and seemingly to be vindicated by events no doubt enhanced his confidence that opposition to the Gulf war could be contained at reasonable cost. In the end, internal regime legitimacy suffered remarkably little. Saddam's defeat and the internal rebellions against him cost him much of his appeal. The destruction of Iraq showed what Asad had spared Syria. Syrians grudgingly gave him credit for shrewdly pre-empting plots to make Syria the next victim of the 'New World Order'.

In summary, the primary explanation for Syria's decision to join the Gulf war coalition was external threats and opportunities. The threat was only secondarily from Iraq and primarily from the potential that the post-bipolar balance of power would leave Syria helpless against Israel. Joining the coalition offered the opportunity to recover Syria's power position in this conflict and Asad had the autonomy to put such *raison d'état* above domestic opinion.

Syria in the post-Gulf war strategic balance

The Kuwait crisis initiated a whole series of realignments in Syrian foreign relations. The new *détente* with Washington was cemented by Syrian adhesion to the US-sponsored peace process through which Asad hoped to reap the benefits of his stand on behalf of 'international legitimacy' in the Gulf war. However, Syrian relations with the USA remained uneasy. The war against Iraq had demonstrated how few obstacles remained to the

deployment of force and economic isolation against those deemed by Washington as pariah states. Syrian suspicions of American motives were revived by US failure to remove Syria from the terrorism list combined with the targeting of Libya (over Pan Am flight 103) and the implicit threat that Syria could be next. America's role in excluding Syria from Gulf security arrangements, its loan guarantees to Israel and its failure to pressure Israel to return the occupied territories were resented (*MEI* 17 April 1992; *ME* June 1992). Vice-President Khaddam told the Islamic summit in Dakar that he distrusted the US ability to hold to consistent standards in the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Syria could no longer count on Soviet support, and the destruction of Iraq had removed it from the Arab-Israeli balance of power, the US sought to sustain Israeli superiority to the point of obstructing Eastern bloc arms shipments to Syria; Asad asked: 'How is it that now the US is trying to embargo Syrian arms imports at a time when Israel's military industries can produce its own arms unlimited and the US provides it with enormous aid to do so?' (*SWB* 14 March 1992).

Despite Syria's inclusion in the Gulf war coalition, Asad perceived the New World Order as largely biased against Arab and Syrian interests. The balance of power, he declared, had been upset [with the collapse of bipolarity] and the new global alignments threatened national sovereignty. 'The main winners have been the Arabs' enemies. Perhaps they expect we shall weaken and collapse but we shall not surrender' (*MEM* 1 April 1992, p. 13). A new balance of power would, in time, be established; unfortunately, while other parts of the world were forming regional blocs the Arab world was going in the opposite direction: 'Some Arabs are absorbed in their own interests or are more at ease with foreigners than brother Arabs and look to them for protection' (*SWB* 14 March 1992). As a result of the invasion of Kuwait, the Arabs had lost Iraq's potential and all solidarity. Asad insisted, however, that 'the current international situation cannot nullify inalienable rights; Israel thinks conditions are right to pursue its ambitions but the UN principles of a settlement have not changed' (*SWB* 14 March 1992).

Seeking to shape a more favourable regional power balance, Syria took advantage of the Gulf crisis to diversify its relations. It re-established its damaged ties with Western Europe, an alternative source of aid to the USSR. Syria also sought alternative arms sources in China and North Korea. Using their desire for debt repayment as leverage, Syria had some success in re-establishing economic and arms relations with Russia and the Eastern bloc and evidently acquired much high-quality equipment at cut prices; interestingly, Gulf aid serviced some of these connections (Lawson 1994a; Shahak 1994). Perhaps most important, Russia evidently forgave much of Syria's military debt and resumed some arms and spare parts shipments on a commercial basis, though reputedly deferring to Israeli

demands that it restrain advanced weapons deliveries (*al-Hayat* in *MEM* 5 May 1994). Syria also preserved its Iranian alliance as a counter to US dominance in the Gulf and as a partner in the development of an arms industry.

Syria's position in the Arab world was ambivalent. The Kuwait war, in demolishing Iraqi power and demonstrating the vulnerability of Saudi Arabia, left Egypt and Syria as the two main Arab powers. The war had strengthened relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But if Syria harboured ambitions of being at the centre of a new Arab order prefigured in the Damascus Declaration, it was disappointed. The GCC states, relying on Western protection, partly disengaged from the Arab world; much of the diplomatic weight they might have carried in Washington on behalf of the Arabs in the peace process was squandered in an unseemly haste to please the USA by starting premature normalization of relations with Israel. As against those promoting a Middle East system in which economic ties bridged national cleavages, thereby integrating Israel into the region, Asad rejoined:

There has been much talk about interests in this historic stage of international development... We say that when we talk about interests we mean... not just economic interests, but... [national] sentiments and common culture and heritage.

(*MEM* 10 March 1994, p. 11)

CONCLUSION

Syria's foreign policy cannot be represented convincingly as chiefly a function of domestic politics; nor is the claim that a revisionist foreign policy is used merely to legitimize a fragile sectarian regime persuasive. External threats are real; Asad's goals are realistic and limited and his strategy is perfectly understandable as a rational balancing of external powers. Asad's regime has proven quite durable and has demonstrated at several key junctures the relative autonomy to ignore public opinion in the interest of *raison d'état*. The combination of remarkable strategic consistency with tactical flexibility is hardly the symptom of a 'dramatic actor' buffeted by the vagaries of internal politics and incapable of implementing a foreign policy consistent with durable national interests. Moreover, while the regime does seek Arab nationalist legitimacy, far from exaggerating an external enemy to maintain public support, it has brought the public to accept a reduced definition of Arab nationalism—an honourable peace with Israel—and has been consistent in its search for the power to achieve such a settlement. In this one key issue area its autonomous goals are congruent

with public opinion and they therefore tend to reinforce each other. Internal legitimization is consistent with a rational foreign policy pursuing not revisionist goals but objectives—deterrence, recovery of occupied territory, spheres of influence—quite consistent with the most conventional definitions of national interest.

David's (1991) omni-balancing model is useful in understanding Syrian foreign policy in so far as it acknowledges the need of policy-makers to take account of both external and internal threats. But his assumption that internal threats are greater than external ones and foreign policy is therefore more immediately shaped by the former does not apply in the Syrian case. For Syria, external threats are formidable, while the regime used a Bonapartist strategy to contain internal threats. The consolidation of its internal power base provided the regime with sufficient autonomy to allow maximum flexibility in manipulating the external balance of power in rational actor fashion. The deepening of Asad's 'omni-balancing', as a possible era of peace with Israel looms, will be discussed in Chapter 7.

5 The Syrian-Iranian alliance and the struggle for the Middle East

THE LOGIC OF THE ALLIANCE

The Syrian-Iranian alliance has, against all expectations, lasted over a decade and a half. Syria and Iran have been referred to as the 'odd couple': to some, an alliance between a Persian Islamic theocracy and a pan-Arab secular republic has appeared bizarre, and therefore a mere temporary 'marriage of convenience' (Hirschfeld 1986:105; Hunter 1985). Despite their leaders' continual affirmation of the 'strategic' character of the alliance, the official photographs of periodic meetings between Western-suited Ba'thists and robed-and-turbaned mullahs underline the dissimilarity of the two regimes.

Given the internal dissimilarity of the two regimes, 'systemic' factors would seem the most promising approach to explaining the alliance. In the geopolitical school, the geographically shaped balance of power shapes alliances: contiguous states tend to be rivals and balancing dictates alliances, checkerboard fashion, with one's neighbour's neighbour. The most obvious factor in the Syrian-Iranian alliance, then, would be the shared threat from contiguous Iraq and Turkey.

If one extends systemic power-balancing explanations to the wider global setting, the Syrian-Iranian alliance might be rooted in a shared interest in deflecting American hegemony over the region. At the regional level itself, this could take the form of balancing the pro-Western axis in the Middle East, which currently includes regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This seemingly permanent by-product of the exceptional penetration of the Middle East subsystem naturally tends to generate its own opposition.

If the alliance is rooted purely in systemic factors, it would appear vulnerable to the great system transformation marked by the end of bipolarity and two Gulf wars, especially the demolishing of Iraqi power, a main shared threat. The slide to unipolarity could potentially precipitate 'bandwagoning' at the expense of balancing—a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict realigning Syria Westward into the hegemonic camp and

the isolation of Iran. That this has not happened suggests that where there are multiple, overlapping shared geopolitical interests, as may be the case of the Syrian-Iranian alliance, an alliance may be more durable.

Geopolitics does not, of course, fully determine alliances, and where it leaves some *choice* of alliances, domestic factors are likely to become more important. For Iran under the Shah, an Israeli alliance was an alternative by which Iraq could be balanced and Syria, a radical state, was itself seen as an ideological threat; that, subsequently, the Islamic Republic replaced Iran's Israeli alliance with a Syrian one might appear to make regime ideology determinative where geopolitics permits choice.

This chapter will show that the most convincing explanation of the Syrian-Iranian alliance is the convergence of vital strategic interests, notably, common opposition to Iraq, Israel and Western hegemony in the region, but that elite ideology and the general utility of the alliance in the regional power balance are additional factors broadly supportive of it. That domestic politics explanations appear to be of distinctly minor importance is further evidence of their limitations in understanding the foreign policies of these two states.

The chapter will also trace the impact of the alliance on the regional system, arguing that it became a key component of the balance of power, indeed a major axis in the struggle for the Middle East; in this respect it has taken on a new significance for both powers which goes beyond its original rationale.

THE PILLARS OF THE SYRIAN-IRANIAN ALLIANCE: CONVERGING IDEOLOGICAL AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS

'Anti-imperialism'

'Anti-imperialism', in the sense of opposition to the regional dominance of the global superpowers and their regional surrogates, is one of two major roots of the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Indeed, the most immediate precipitant of the alliance was the Islamic revolution, which brought a new 'anti-imperialist' elite to power and de-aligned Iran from its traditional partners. The Shah had positioned Iran as a force defending Western and conservative Arab interests in the region against radical Arab nationalist forces. Iran was seen by Israel as a key component, together with Turkey, Pakistan and Ethiopia, in an alliance with peripheral Middle Eastern states against the Arab nationalist core, including Egypt, Syria and Iraq (Fuller 1991:119-135).

This foreign policy had enjoyed little domestic support and had no constituents among those elements which emerged dominant after the

revolution—the religious community, the bazaar and the intelligentsia (Bakhash 1990:117). Israel's occupation of Jerusalem and victimization of the Palestinians and America's backing of Israel and Washington's intervention in Iranian politics against nationalist forces had created deep public enmity against both states which Khomeini mobilized against the Shah.

The ideological transformation of Iran's elite by the Islamic revolution turned the Shah's foreign policy on its head. The Islamic revolution had a mission throughout the Middle East, of which anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism were central components. That the first Palestinian embassy in the Middle East should open in the Iranian capital and on the premises of the defunct Israeli mission was symbolic of the sea-change that the revolution caused in Iran's attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. While conservative pro-Western regimes became the targets of Iranian subversion and Israel was ideologically disqualified as an ally, Iran sought to find kindred radical regimes and movements as new partners in the export of revolution to the Arab world. Syria, on the front line with Israel and confronting the West in Lebanon, had credible revolutionary credentials. Ties already existed between Iranian revolutionaries and the Syrian regime which had given modest help to them and had offered Khomeini asylum when he was expelled from Iraq.

The Khomeini regime also stressed the Islamic character of the revolution, not its Iranian roots, and re-emphasized Arab culture and language, the original vehicles of Islam, after the Shah had tried to eradicate such influences. Export of Islamic revolution required breaking down Persian-Arab barriers. Alliance with Syria served this agenda, too. However, the alliance also reduced Iran's appeal to Sunni Islamic movements, pushing the Syrian Ikhwan, for example, to support Iraq (Fuller 1991:119–135; Hirschfeld 1986:109; Hunter 1985; Marschall 1992:434–436; Seale 1988:352–353).

Asad responded with alacrity to the possibility of an alliance with Iran. A geo-strategist, he saw the Shah's pro-Israeli policies as creating an Iranian-Israeli hold on the Arab world. For example, Israel had encouraged Iran to stir up the Kurds, thus preventing Iraq from lending its military might to the Arab struggle against Israel. The Shah had sold oil to Israel in return for training his military personnel there and the two had collaborated in subversion against radical Arab regimes. Syria also disliked the Shah's subservience to the US (Bakhash 1990:116–117; Seale 1988:353). Syria was the second country after the USSR to recognize the Iranian revolutionary regime. This and Arafat's visit to Tehran soon after the revolution symbolized the importance radical Arab forces were attaching to the end of the Pahlavi order and the Arab-Islamic orientation of the revolutionary regime. Mutual

fear of Iraq was, therefore, not the sole cause of the Syrian-Iranian alliance and it was already in formation before the Iran-Iraq war (Stanley 1990:55).

By the early 1980s, Syria and Iran were brought closer together by shared threats from 'imperialist' forces. Iran was isolated and mortally threatened by the Iraqi invasion of 1980, which it believed to have been encouraged by 'imperialism'. Syria, for its part, also felt increasingly vulnerable. Egypt's defection from its Syrian alliance after Camp David and the quick collapse of the anti-Camp David Arab front with Iraq, left Syria virtually alone in the face of superior Israeli power. Although no substitute for Egypt's active presence on Israel's southern front, Islamic Iran, with its fierce anti-Zionism and its strategic weight, was a valuable asset in the Arab-Israeli power balance and a counter to Syria's relative isolation.

The two states also shared antipathy to US policies under Reagan, from the American backing for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon to attempts, as Damascus saw it, to encircle Syria by sponsoring separate settlements between Israel and Lebanon and Jordan. Both Iran and Syria were targeted as terrorist states and excluded from international diplomacy by the USA, producing a common resentment of the US-dominated world order (Ramazani 1986:175–178).

The alliance as an 'anti-imperialist' front was most clear in the convergence of Syrian and Iranian objectives in Lebanon beginning with the 1982 Israeli invasion. Iran, in its effort to export its revolution and to acquire a role in the crusade against Israel needed access to the Lebanese Shi'ites which Syria could obstruct or facilitate (Hirschfeld 1986:110–111). Tehran also seized the opportunity of the invasion to demonstrate its value to Syria. Syria, for its part, needed any help it could get in mobilizing a Lebanese coalition against the Israeli occupation, the pro-Israeli Gemayal government Israel installed and the 1983 US-backed Lebanese-Israeli accord (Chalala 1988:113; Hirschfeld 1986:117; Norton 1990:117). The dramatic effectiveness of the Iranian-sponsored Islamic resistance in Lebanon taught Israel the costs of interventionism and, in helping to foil a mortal threat to Syria, proved to Asad the strategic value of the Iranian alliance (Seale 1988:396–397). He acknowledged Iran's response in Syria's hour of need: Asad explicitly acknowledged that Iran was the only country to send forces to Syria's aid during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. After Israel's withdrawal to its self-declared 'security zone' in southern Lebanon, an element of rivalry sometimes overshadowed the alliance in Lebanon, but Syria still found Iranian cooperation important in maintaining pressure on the 'security zone' and, at times, in asserting its hegemony in Lebanon.

While their shared 'anti-imperialist' struggle normally brought Syria and Iran together, certain ideological divergences led to periodic differences

over the goals of the struggle. Arab nationalist and revolutionary Islamic ideologies diverge over the secular state, and to the extent to which Iran, in its messianic phase, made advances in exporting Islamic revolution—whether in its offensive against Iraq or in its ambition to foster an Islamic state in Lebanon, relations with the secular pragmatic Asad regime were strained. Syria's interest in carefully pressuring Israel in southern Lebanon only partially coincided with Khomeini's desire to make Lebanon a base for an anti-Zionist crusade. However, the death of Khomeini, the main energy behind Iranian messianism, and the rise of the pragmatic Rafsanjani leadership brought Iran's objectives much more in line with those of Asad.

Strains in the alliance's 'anti-imperialist front' also resulted from the divergences of interests in the struggle against their enemies. The most important such conflict of interest revolved around the Israeli-Iran arms deal and growing Syrian opposition to the continuing hostage crisis perpetuated by Iran's Lebanese clients (Bakhash 1990:124; Marschall 1992:442–443). According to Seale, a Syrian intelligence agent in Tehran, Iyad al-Mahmud, uncovered the 'Iran-contra' arms-for-hostages deal. When Iran started releasing hostages in return for the arms, Asad requested they be released to him so that he could take some credit and ward off the danger from the Hindawi affair (an alleged plot to shoot down an Israeli airliner) over which Syria was being targeted as a terrorist state. When Iran rebuffed him, Asad had the arms deal leaked to the Lebanese newspaper, *al-Shiraa* (MEI 21 November 1986; Seale 1988:489–490). Another view attributes the leak to anti-Rafsanjani, pro-Montazeri factions in Tehran (ME April 1987; Segev 1988). Whatever the case, Iran's discomfiture was Syria's relief: the exposure undermined US anti-terrorist policy and took the steam out of the mounting US-Israeli campaign of pressure against Syria. The hostage for (Israeli) arms deal, in indicating that Iran's anti-Israeli policy was rooted less in immutable ideology than changing interests, alarmed Syria. Reports of an Iranian oil deal with Israel in 1990 must have raised new doubts in Damascus over how far Iran could be trusted; while the deal was denied by Iranian officials, its denunciation by Ayatollah Montazeri gave the report some plausibility (ME February 1990).

Iraq

The Iran-Iraq war translated the budding Syrian-Iranian alliance into reality and their shared animosity to Iraq became a main pillar of the alliance. From Syria's point of view, historic rivalry with Iraq had escalated into a bitter political struggle with Saddam Hussein. Iraq, militarily strong, oil rich, and ruled by a wing of the Ba'th party, could have been a valuable Syrian ally against Israel. But the Syrian and Iraqi wings of the party had

been rivals since the Salah Jedid-led 'radical' faction of the Syrian party ousted party founder Michel Aflaq and Iraq welcomed him as titular party leader. Thereafter the two regimes each claimed to be the legitimate Ba'th and sought to subvert the other and, after Nasser died, became rivals to inherit the mantle of Arab nationalist leadership (Kienle 1990:32–57).

Asad, on coming to power in 1970, tried to bury the hatchet and include Iraq in a military eastern front against Israel; Iraq did help defend the Syrian front during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. But Baghdad assumed a rejectionist stance after the war and denounced Syria's participation in the post-war Kissinger-led peace diplomacy as an abandonment of the Palestinian cause. Iraq's condition for reconciliation was Syrian rejection of UN Resolution 242. Iraq was also angered by Syria's 1976 intervention in Lebanon where it sought hegemony over the Palestinians at Iraq's expense and thwarted Iraq's attempt to orchestrate rejectionist forces there. Conflicts over Euphrates' water, which Syria tried to use as leverage against Iraq, and over fees for the transit of Iraq oil via the trans-Syrian pipeline, in which Iraq had the upper hand over Syria, manifested the continuing rivalry of the two regimes. Iraq cut off the flow of oil in 1976, costing Syria US\$136 million per year in transit fees and forcing a reduction in the fee as the price of resuming pumping in 1979; even after its resumption, Iraq, having completed an alternative pipeline across Turkey, pumped less than one-third of the line's capacity (Hirschfeld 1986:115; Kienle 1990:61–134).

After Camp David, there was a brief Iraqi-Syrian *rapprochement* which lasted long enough to isolate Egypt and extract enormous subsidies from the Arab oil monarchies for the frontline states at the 1978 Baghdad Arab summit conference. Asad was ambivalent towards Iraq's role in opposition to Camp David: while he had always sought to harness Iraqi resources to the eastern front, he was also wary of Iraq's bid for leadership in the Arab-Israeli conflict which he considered to be Syria's natural role as the main frontline state. When, in accordance with Ba'thist ideology, the two regimes warily explored Syrian-Iraqi unity in 1978, their suspicions of each other ruled out any practical power-sharing arrangements in the proposed federal state and precipitated another round of mutual subversion. Saddam Hussein, seeing a pro-Syrian plot in the Iraqi Ba'th against him, purged his rivals and broke relations with Syria in 1979. Thereafter Iraq supported the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's mortal challenge (1978–1982) to Asad's regime (Kienle 1990:135–169).

Syria's support for Iran after Iraq's 1980 invasion cemented this new enmity. Despite their common Ba'thist ideology, Asad and Saddam Hussein had entirely different views of Iran, largely shaped by the different geopolitically determined threats they faced. To Saddam, a Shi'a Islamic revolution was a mortal threat to the integrity of Iraq with its majority Shi'a population, as well as to the survival of his Sunni-dominated Arab nationalist

regime. But the supposed military weakness of Iran after the revolution also seemed to present an opportunity to assert leadership in the Persian Gulf and Arab world by defeating Iran and 'liberating' the Arabic-speaking oil-rich province of Khuzistan.

Asad saw it differently: Iran's Islamic revolution had transformed Iran from an ally of Israel into a partisan of the Arab cause, but Saddam's war had taken Iran and Iraq out of the Arab-Israeli power balance:

This revolution introduced important changes in the strategic balance... [Iran] supports the Arabs, without hesitation,...for the sake of liberating our lands...How can we...lose a country like Iran of the Islamic revolution...with all its human, military, and economic potential.

(Maoz 1995:187)

He condemned Iraq's invasion as the wrong war at the wrong time against the wrong enemy, predicting, rightly, that it would exhaust the Arabs, divide them and divert them from the Israeli menace (Seale 1988:356–358).

Once the war started, Asad was under Iranian pressure to take a stand with Iran. He did not immediately do so; according to Iranian sources, he refused to see an Iranian envoy carrying such a message in September 1980. Asad was perhaps waiting to see whether Iran could hold off an Iraqi victory before committing himself. Syria opposed formation of an Arab coalition against Iran in November 1980 but only came out decisively on Iran's side in 1981. The 1982 cutting off of the trans-Syrian pipeline decisively committed Syria to Iran. In 1983 Asad passed up an opportunity to reconsider this commitment when he rejected an attempt by King Fahd to arrange a meeting with Saddam Hussein (Emami 1995).

Once Asad had earned Saddam's deep enmity by siding with Iran, he had an interest in preventing an Iraqi victory which would allow Saddam to seek revenge. The Iraqi leader possessed a large army, but the main Iraqi threat was political and ideological, not military (see Chapter 4), namely, rivalry over leadership of Arab nationalism. With Iraq tied down (and Egypt isolated), Asad could make a more credible bid for Arab leadership, while preoccupation with the war reduced Iraq's ability to challenge Syria in the *mashreq* and especially in Lebanon. The political damage done to Asad's nationalist credentials in siding with Iran against Arab Iraq may have neutralized his potential gains in the inter-Arab arena. But if Saddam succeeded against Iran, the resultant Iraqi hegemony in the Gulf would allow him to assert Iraq's claim to Arab leadership at Syria's expense (Chalala 1988:111–113; Seale 1988:358–359).

Asad's support for Iran cannot be divorced from his position in the struggle with Israel and the Arab-Israeli power balance. Israel, in fact, had

an interest in the war. Israel had had a hand in starting it: according to Seale (1988:361–362), Israel fed Iraq misinformation through Iranian exiles, exaggerating the weakness of Iran's armed forces. It took advantage of Iran's desperate need during the war to sell arms to the Islamic republic, thus competing with Syria for Iranian favour and trying to resurrect the Israel-Iran anti-Arab axis. Israel was also happy that the war institutionalized Syrian-Iraqi rivalry for it feared a Syria-Iraq alliance's potential to shift the balance of power against it more than any other alignment. The Iran-Iraq war exhausted two potential Israeli adversaries, used up Arab oil wealth and neutralized the oil weapon.

In supporting continuance of the war, particularly after Iran turned back the Iraqi threat, Asad could, therefore, plausibly be accused of putting personal and regime interests threatened by Saddam ahead of Syria's national interest in an Iraqi alliance against Israel. However, Asad justified his policies on the grounds that Iraq under Saddam was actually a liability in Syria's struggle with Israel. He argued that Saddam was being used by imperialist forces to split the anti-imperialist front and was utterly unreliable as a potential partner against Israel. He went so far as to suggest that:

this invasion was...planned to create a new enemy for the Arab nation, an enemy that was placed on the same level as Israel. This situation would make us distribute our forces between the front of the real enemy... and the Iranian front.

(Damascus Radio 7 November 1980)

Iraq's vital interests lay too much in the Persian Gulf region for it to commit itself to the Arab-Israeli conflict, yet its wider pan-Arab ambitions, requiring it to champion the Arab cause against Israel, threatened Syria's right, as the main frontline state, to lead the Arab struggle with Israel. Iraq undermined Syria's attempt to impose its leadership on a Levant coalition to contain Israel as Saddam backed Palestinian, Lebanese and Jordanian defiance of Damascus. Iraq, being away from the front line, could indulge in reckless brinksmanship in dealing with Israel which could draw Syria into a war with Israel or obstruct chances for a diplomatic settlement. Yet when Iraq was pushed by its need for Western support against Iran to moderate its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, it undermined Syrian interests by supporting the Fahd plan for Arab-Israeli peace at a time when Syria was pursuing tactical rejectionism and by backing Egypt's return to the Arab fold without it having to abrogate its separate peace with Israel. No doubt Asad hoped that Saddam's possible downfall from failure in war could result in a friendly military-Ba'thist regime which could be a proper partner in the Arab-Israeli military balance. Moreover, supporting Iran

prevented the conflict from becoming the all-Arab war against Iran which could have opened the door for Israel to restore its ties with Tehran. A Syrian minister even suggested that an 'Iranian victory in the Gulf war will allow for the establishment of three states—Iran, Iraq, Syria—as the principle front against the Zionist state' (Maoz 1995:188). In short, Asad's pro-Iranian policy grew partly out of strategic calculations regarding the balance of power with Israel, not just personal animosity against Saddam.

From Iran's point of view, historic rivalry with Iraq was rooted in geopolitical contiguity. As the most powerful Arab state in the Gulf region, Iraq was a natural rival for control of the waterways and influence over the Gulf Arab states. Arbitrary imperial boundary-drawing had institutionalized territorial disputes between them. The Ba' thist regime was seen as a pariah in Islamic Iran for its repression of Shi'ites and its brutal execution of oppositionist Shi'a clergy who had intimate ties with the Iranian mullahs. After the war started, Iraq was seen as an agent of the West used to contain the Islamic revolution.

Iranian leaders must have debated the anomaly of an alliance with one Ba' thist regime, supposedly a champion of anti-imperialism, while denouncing the other as an imperialist agent. Iran could not have perceived Asad's regime as any less anti-Islamic after his repression of the Syrian Ikhwan. But, once Iraq invaded Iran and Syria sided with Tehran, such doubts were put aside. The alliance became a vital strategic interest.

Iran's war effort gained considerably from the alliance. Syria's shut down of the trans-Syria pipeline deprived Iraq of half its oil export capacity and US\$17 million per day in revenue, thereby damaging its capacity to finance the war. Syria's massing of troops on Iraq's border forced Saddam to deploy troops from the Iranian front. Syria was also a conduit to Moscow through which Iran bought substantial amounts of Eastern bloc arms in the early part of the war and through which it hoped to deter Soviet support for Iraq (Chubin 1990; Hirschfeld 1986:197–208).

Iran needed, for both strategic and ideological reasons, to prevent Iraq from depicting the war as an Arab-Persian struggle and Syria assisted in this (Hirschfeld 1986:108–110). While the opposition to Iraq of certain radical Arab states, such as Algeria, South Yemen and Libya, benefited Iran, it was alliance with Syria, an Arab state combining ideological compatibility with significant geopolitical centrality, that really counted. Syria succeeded in preventing a total anti-Iranian front at the various Arab summit meetings during the war. This encouraged the lower Gulf states, notably the United Arab Emirates and Oman, to hedge their bets and maintain ties with Iran. Syria's Foreign Minister claimed that Syria had foiled Iraqi attempts to draw the Gulf Arab states into the war. When Iran was being blamed for needlessly continuing the war after driving Iraqi

forces back into their own territory, Syria put forth a peace plan which Iraq rejected, relieving Tehran of the onus for the war's continuation. Long after the war, President Rafsanjani acknowledged Iran's debt to Syria:

We still recall that from the beginning of the war which Iraq waged against Iran, President Hafiz al-Asad adopted a stand on the side of right, defended this stand [against] all kinds of pressure that was put on him in the name of Arabism. He...refused to disassociate himself from a country that advocates Islam merely because this country is not an Arab country.

(SWB 27 September 1990)

Syrian and Iranian interests in the war converged but did not totally overlap. When Syria periodically responded to opportunities to escape from its relative Arab isolation, Iran invariably reacted with alarm (*MEI* 20 December 1985). In 1985, Iran was angered by Syria's *rapprochement* with Jordan, a close Iraqi ally. As the tide of the war turned in favour of Iran, Syria tried to present itself as a mediator which could restrain Iran, but it faced increasing Arab impatience at its failure to deliver on this. During the Iranian offensive against Iraq's Faw peninsula adjoining Kuwait, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia threatened Syria with a complete aid cut-off if it did not abandon the alliance or restrain Iran (*MEI* 21 February 1986). Syria, in economic crisis and fearing an Israeli attack at this time, could ill afford a total break with these states. Syria opposed Iranian capture of Iraqi territory and opposed any Iranian expansion of the war to the Gulf states. Since disputes over Iranian oil deliveries to Syria and Hizbollah were also festering, the alliance was under strain. Saudi Arabia offered to cover Syria's oil debt in return for a *rapprochement* with Iraq; after Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister arrived in Damascus with a promise of renewed oil shipments Asad backed out of a meeting with Iraqi leaders and declared the Iranian alliance was strategic (*ME* July 1986; *MEI* 18 April 1986, 30 May 1986, 13 June 1986, 27 June 1986). Oil shipments became contingent on Syria rejecting efforts of the anti-Iran coalition to detach Syria from the Iranian alliance. Iranian displeasure with any Syrian move towards Iran's Arab rivals could easily affect the levels of cooperation with Syrian goals in Lebanon which Hizbollah would show while Syria used these same moves to pressure Iran to cooperate in Lebanon (*MEI* 25 July 1986).

There was a rerun of the crisis as Iran threatened Basra. Facing economic pressure from Kuwait, and aware that Syria's Arab nationalist credentials would be severely damaged by complicity in the fall of an Arab city to Iran, Asad warned Iran that the alliance would be in jeopardy if it persisted in its assault on Basra. Syria did little to block condemnations of Iran for the

siege and for failure to accept Iraqi cease-fire proposals at Arab and Islamic summits. Indeed, it actually signed the 1987 Amman summit statement condemning Iran, although it refused to support a total Arab break with Iran. Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the USSR all had a try at reconciling Iraq and Syria. Perhaps symptomatic of the strains in the alliance at this time, Iran gave Asad no prior notice of its acceptance of the cease-fire ending the war (Emami 1995; *MEI* 23 January 1987, 6 February 1987, 16 March 1987, 21 November 1987, 23 January 1988).

Once the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, it was possible that the alliance, in so far as hostility to Iraq was its main rationale, could have weakened or ruptured. Syria moved to overcome its Arab isolation and Iran needed Syria less. Yet Iraq remained a threat to both. Punishing Asad (notably in Lebanon) was high on Saddam's agenda, while Iran, the apparent loser in the war, still faced an enormous Iraqi army which had not fully withdrawn from occupied Iranian territory.

THE DOMESTIC CORRELATES OF THE SYRIAN-IRANIAN ALLIANCE

Domestic factors—intra-elite conflict, economic interests, public opinion—provide very limited explanatory power compared to systemic ones in understanding the Syrian-Iranian alliance. In neither regime is the alliance an undiluted advantage for elites in domestic politics and in neither does it satisfy powerful domestic interests or needs.

Domestic politics was never more than a secondary factor in Syria's calculations. To be sure, during the Islamic uprising against the regime (1978–1982), which was encouraged by the success of the Iranian revolution, the alliance with Iran may have pre-empted Iranian temptations to support Syrian Islamists. Association with an Islamic revolutionary regime probably blunted the impact of the Islamic ideological attack on Asad's regime. Syrian Islamists were undoubtedly demoralized when Iran was brought to denounce them as 'gangs carrying out the Camp David conspiracy against Syria' in collusion with Egypt, Israel and the United States. Nevertheless, the strong Sunni orientation of Syrian fundamentalism made alliance with a Shi'ite regime of limited internal advantage for the Asad regime.

Another sense in which Syrian domestic politics could be seen as helping to determine the Iranian alliance is that internal security risks made an alternative alliance with Iraq (as part of the eastern front with Israel) quite risky. Iraq was especially dangerous to the Asad regime because it had a history of successfully appealing across state boundaries, especially to Sunnis disillusioned with 'Alawi rule'—ranging from Islamists to Ba' thists in the regime's own base; as such, keeping Iraq at arms' length was perhaps

the safest policy. Asad did, nevertheless, pursue the 1978 Syrian-Iraqi unity project and only opted for the Iranian alliance after Saddam Hussein himself pulled out of the union. Thereafter, Asad may have seen the war as a way of containing Saddam's internal threat by weakening or even bringing down his regime. As for the Iranian alliance, Asad could hardly have seen it as risk-free in terms of domestic politics. The alliance actually made Asad's regime more vulnerable to Iraqi subversion in so far as its best defence, its Arab nationalist legitimacy, was damaged by allying with a non-Arab state against an Arab Ba'thist state which many Syrians saw as a natural partner.

Foreign policy-makers in a multisectarian but Alawi-dominated regime presiding over a mosaic society, could not wholly ignore sectarian politics in their policy towards Iran. But such sectarian calculations work neither for or against the alliance. To be sure, the regime's Alawi base made the Iranian alignment far less risky than had the regime depended primarily on the support of Sunnis, for whom the Persian/Shi'a versus Arab/Sunni cleavage is sharper; a Sunni-based regime might have found the alliance too dangerous domestically, whatever its geopolitical advantages. But in the atmosphere of sectarian hostility typical of the early 1980s, the alliance did appear to some Sunnis as a 'Shi'a axis' aimed at them and seemed to validate an interpretation of the regime as an Alawi minority rather than a Ba'thist one (Chalala 1988:114-116; Hirschfeld 1986:117). That Asad opted for and sustained the Iranian alliance in spite of such domestic risks is arguably indicative of the relative autonomy of the regime in the foreign policy sphere and, arguably, of the priority given to geopolitical factors over domestic politics in decision-making.

Given this autonomy, the potential is greater for the personal preferences of the leadership, as shaped by its particular background, to bias policy. Unquestionably, Asad the geopolitician is the personal architect of the Iranian alliance, but purely personal factors seem to be of minimal importance in shaping his strategy. The personal animosity between Asad and Saddam Hussein was certainly a major obstacle to an alternative Iraqi alliance but, as has been seen, it was Saddam who closed the door on it.

What about the claim that Asad was drawn to Iranian leaders out of religious sectarianism? The notion of a 'Shi'ite axis' implies that some supposed Alawi religious solidarity with other Shi'ites (if Alawis are, indeed, Shi'ites) is the motive behind the alliance. The correlation between sectarian origin and policy for Alawi Ba'thists like Asad has never been so simple: he is part of the generation of Alawis who sought to sublimate their Alawi particularism in the wider Arab nationalism which accepted non-Sunnis as equal members of the polity, and he sees the Alawi community as best served by identification with the wider interests of the Syrian Ba'thist state and the Arab nation. Moreover, for Alawi Arabs, some tenuous Alawi

historical connection to Shi'ism does little to bridge the more important linguistic and national gap between Persians and Arabs (Seale 1988:351–352, 356).

To be sure, Alawis and Shi'as may share some fellow feeling as the historic targets of Sunni discrimination. More important, in the early 1980s, Asad perceived himself and the Alawis as the target of an alarming Sunni rebellion and assassination campaign supported by the same Sunni states in conflict with Iran. However, an alliance with Iran based on sectarian solidarity, in driving a wedge between the Alawi elite and the Sunni majority, would have been counterproductive from the point of view of regime stability.

Were Asad's worldview drawn in revisionist religious terms, the idea of a Shi'ite axis running from Iran through Shi'ite southern Iraq and Syria to southern Lebanon might have made sense. To be sure, the Iranian revolution had made Asad aware of the revolutionary potential of Shi'ism and the possibility of harnessing it to Syrian reason of state (Stanley 1990:55). But Asad is relentlessly secular in his outlook and Syrian policy has consistently supported the integrity of secular and multisectarian states in Iraq and Lebanon, no less than in Syria itself.

There is nothing in the record to indicate that religious motives or sectarian solidarity have ever been an important factor in Asad's decisions. The geopolitical and strategic advantages of the alliance are enough to explain it without resort to such factors (Chalala 1988:109–110; Marshall 1992:435–436), although it is reasonable to suppose that residual sectarian sentiments may reinforce policies arrived at for reasons of state.

The economic explanation for the alliance has apparent plausibility but, in fact, it was never more than a secondary consideration for Syrian decision-makers. Asad has never allowed economic factors to force him into foreign policy decisions which he would not otherwise have taken on strategic grounds. It is true that Syria received a million free barrels of Iranian oil per year and another 5–7 million per year at a 1/3 discount. The Iranian subsidy, said to be worth about US\$269 million per year (and conceivably as much as US\$400 million per year), came at a time when the Syrian economy was in particular trouble. But Syria lost transit dues worth as much US\$160 million/year from its closure of the trans-Syrian pipeline which could very well have risen to some US\$600 million per year (Hirschfeld 1986:113; *ME* December 1985). Moreover, by forcing the Iraqis to build alternative pipelines, Syria permanently devalued its own pipeline. Were Syria's foreign policy for sale to the highest bidder, Syria would have accepted the reported Saudi offer of US\$2 billion to open the pipeline (Hirschfeld 1986:115). If anything, the Iranian alliance, in diversifying Syria's access to external resources, makes it less vulnerable to pressure from any one source and

enhances Syria's foreign policy autonomy as well as its economic independence (Hunter 1985).

The alliance does not appear to have been a domestic politics asset for the Iranian regime. To be sure, Iranian spokesmen insist that all Iranian factions view the alliance as a national security asset for Iran and that, as such, it is not an issue of dispute in Iranian policy circles. Moreover, Iran claims that the ideological divide between the two states is easing: since the collapse of socialism and the USSR, Asad has been developing the 'Islamic card', fostering Islam in the media, building mosques and having his son Basil buried as a Shi'a (interview with Iranian diplomats, Iranian Embassy, Damascus, June 1994). But it strains credibility to believe that Iranians see the alliance with Syria's irreligious Ba'thist politicians as a form of Islamic solidarity.

There have, moreover, been Iranian factions periodically at odds with Syria: Ayatollah Montazeri, in particular, engaged in polemics with Damascus over Hizbollah. The radical mullah Ali Akbar Mohtashemi charged that Syria's stand with the USA in the second Gulf war sacrificed principle to economic gain and asserted that 'Syria is not a model for us: we should not approve or accept everything that Syria says or does' (*SWB* 18 September 1990). On the other hand, the pragmatic Rafsanjani seems very much at ease in dealing with Asad and his first visit abroad as president was to Damascus.

The alliance has cost Iran economically. Syria fell behind in payment for Iranian oil shipments, its debt increasing from US\$1.5 billion in 1985 to a reputed US\$5 billion in 1989. In 1985, the Iranian Majlis refused to renew the oil deal, accusing Syria of selling the subsidized shipments at market prices (*MEI* 10 January 1986). As its oil revenues were halved in 1985/6 by the fall of oil prices, Iran could ill afford to subsidize Syria. Syria still reportedly owes US\$2 billion to Iran but Iran is not pushing the issue even though its own economy has been in crisis (Stanley 1990:62).

The Syrian-Iranian relation appears largely confined to the elite level in both countries. Iranian public opinion must be ambivalent towards Syria. Syria probably enjoys some support as one of the few countries that has aligned with Iran in international politics. However, most Iranians, believing Iran the far more important country, think Syria gets more out of the alliance than does Iran. Asad's bloody repression of the Syrian Islamic movement at Hama, an event which checked the apparent spread of radical Islam unleashed by the Iranian revolution must, however, have created animosity towards the Ba'th regime despite Iranian leaders' justification of it. Any credit Syria may have won in the eyes of young Iranian militants for its stand against Israel in Lebanon in 1982 was probably dissipated in

Syria's conflicts with Hizbollah. The Iranian middle class may view Iranian subsidization of Syria as imposing sacrifices on them on behalf of a corrupt authoritarian regime.

Syria is one of the few countries that ordinary Iranians can readily visit and many Iranian tourists visit the Shi'a shrines there. The Iranian embassy in Damascus believes the six flights per week and 1.1 million Iranians who have visited Syria since the revolution have brought the two cultures closer together. There are scholarship exchanges and a large Iranian cultural centre in Syria which may be spreading Iranian influence among some Syrians; the large numbers of pious pilgrims may have some cumulative impact in accelerating Islamization in Syria. However, it is doubtful this has generated much sense of kinship between the two peoples. Syria restricted early attempts by pilgrims to disseminate the symbols of Iranian militant Islam, and portraits of the ayatollahs have been confined to the hotels the Iranians frequent. Most secular Syrians are indifferent to the Iranian presence. For them, the alliance is all geopolitics, unpopular at first, now accepted as beneficial in balancing Iraq and Saudi Arabia, but not a people-to-people relation. Economic ties remain modest. Most Iranian tourists are not the big spenders which could give Syrian merchants a stake in the relation, and Iranian investments in Syria are still the exception.

THE REGIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE SYRIAN-IRANIAN ALLIANCE: POWER BALANCING IN THE 1980s

If the Syrian-Iranian alliance was rooted in shared (Israeli and Iraqi) enemies and the shared threat of Western hegemony in the region, it soon also proved its utility to Syria and Iran in their efforts to manoeuvre in and affect the regional balance of power. The characteristics of the Middle East regional system, especially as they affected Syria and Iran, are a crucial context in which the alliance developed. The main feature of this system in the 1980s was the fragmentation of the Arab world, the collapse of many of its traditional alignments, and its increasing vulnerability to penetration by Western influence and by non-Arab states on both its eastern (Iran) and western (Israel) flanks. The alliance arguably became a component of the new regional power balance which contained the advancing regional hegemony of Israel, the West and local Western clients following the breakdown of any semblance of pan-Arab order in the 1980s.

What order the modern Arab world has enjoyed has been imposed by a regional hegemon or a leading axis which normally included Egypt and Syria. An Egypt-centred Arab order under Nasser, largely supported by Syria, sought to balance Israeli power in the 1950s and 1960s but collapsed

in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. A new Arab axis of Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, combining military power and oil wealth—Ajami's (1977/8) 'Arab Triangle'—emerged during the 1973 war and thereafter sought a negotiated peace with Israel in return for the lands captured in 1967. The relative pan-Arab cohesion established by this axis was, however, destroyed by two major events (Hinnebusch 1987; Korany 1988; Noble 1991).

First, Sadat's pursuit of a separate peace with Israel split Egypt and Syria and unnaturally isolated Egypt from the Arab system for more than a decade. Syria and Iraq became rivals to fill the vacuum of Arab leadership but neither could impose its hegemony. Syria not only faced Israel alone, but also a hostile Iraq to its rear (Marschall 1992:433–435). In the absence of a leading axis, centrifugal forces came to dominate the Arab world and the Arab front against Israel came close to collapse.

Second, the Islamic revolution in Iran precipitated a major regional realignment. The tacit Iranian-Israeli alliance against radical Arab nationalist regimes crumbled as Iran was transformed from protector of the regional *status quo* into a revisionist state seeking to export revolution. It was hostile not only to Israel, but also to Iraq and the traditional Gulf monarchies whose religious legitimacy was challenged by its Islamic revolution. For the first time in recent history, Iran became a factor in Arab mass-level politics, its appeal rooted in a universalistic message mixing Islam, anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism (Hunter 1987).

This, however, precipitated the Iraqi invasion of Iran and the resulting Iran-Iraq war. The war further split the Arab world. Syria and several radical states backed Iran while Iraq, claiming to defend the Gulf Arabs from the Iranian challenge, constructed a formidable anti-Iranian coalition embracing Iraq, the PLO, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Jordan and increasingly Egypt, which, its weight being needed in the Arab camp, was gradually rehabilitated. The Iran-Iraq war also led to growing Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shi'a divisions which obstructed Iran's attempted Islamic mobilization against the Gulf Arab sheikhdoms. The alliance with Syria, however, allowed Iran to 'leap over' the anti-Iran wall of containment and become a player in the Arab state system—notably by establishing a foothold in Lebanon. Syria could conceivably have 'bandwagoned'—joined the Arab majority against Iran and thereby helped construct a new Arab order aimed at Iran—but this would have meant deferring to Saudi and Iraqi leadership and accepting the downgrading of the conflict with Israel. For Asad, *raison d'état* dictated balancing.

The marginalization of Egypt and Iraq created a power vacuum which Syria potentially could fill. As Egypt pursued a separate Israeli peace after 1975, Asad, facing isolation and burned by his dependence on Egypt, had set out to mobilize the resources to go it alone in the conflict

with Israel. He sought an alternative to his Egyptian alliance by imposing Syrian leadership on the Levant and generally asserting Syria's status as the leading pan-Arab power in the Arab-Israeli arena. However, Camp David and the Iran-Iraq war were accompanied by (and deepened) a decline of the pan-Arabism which had long contained Arab state rivalries and deterred alignments with non-Arab states. Arabism seemingly receded before a revival of narrower local and sectarian loyalties, a parallel resurgence of identity with the larger Islamic community, and the consolidation of separate states pursuing interests frequently at odds with the putative pan-Arab interest. All of this made it harder for Syria to mobilize pan-Arab sentiments behind its confrontation with Israel while making an alliance with non-Arab but Islamic Iran more defensible and useful: it would permit Syria to harness Islamic militancy to supplement pan-Arabism, notably in Lebanon.

The Iran-Iraq war and Syria's alliance with Iran had an ambivalent impact on Syria's strategic interests and bid for Arab leadership. The alliance at first isolated Syria from the Arab coalition backing Iraq, made these Arab states more ready to leave it on its own in confrontations with Israel (as in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon), to reduce their financial support for its frontline position and to withdraw support for its role in Lebanon. The war diverted Arab attention from the struggle with Israel, permitted Egypt's rehabilitation without abandoning its separate peace with Israel, and pushed Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states towards the USA which was trying to promote an Arab-Israeli settlement excluding Syria. The increasing separation of the Gulf/Arabian peninsula and Arab-Israeli arenas benefited Israel and its US patron: at the same time that the Reagan administration was making Israel its primary 'strategic asset' in the region and tolerating its invasion of Lebanon, the Gulf Arab states sought US protection from Iran.

The potential shift in the balance of power against Israel from the Iranian revolution thus did not materialize. Indeed, with Iran and Iraq at war and Egypt neutralized, a more activist Israeli leadership under Begin projected Israel's power in the Arab world with little check, bombing Iraq and Tunis and accelerating its colonization of the Palestinian West Bank. Israel's Lebanon invasion attempted to crush the PLO, symbol of Palestinian resistance, and to thwart Syria's Levant ambitions by ousting it from Lebanon and dragging Beirut into a separate peace. The Arab world was being simultaneously penetrated by Israel militarily and the USA diplomatically.

In time, however, Syria was able to manipulate the Iranian alliance to its advantage in inter-Arab politics. The cheap oil Iran provided limited the economic pressures of Gulf Arab aid donors on Syria's foreign policy.

The Iranian alliance constituted a 'pincer', giving Syria leverage over Saudi Arabia and its GCC partners (Hirschfeld 1986:106, 119–120). Especially when Iran was on the offensive, Saudi Arabia and the GCC states looked to Syria to contain Iranian temptations to spread the war to the Arab Gulf; in return, Syria could expect financial and political recompense. This probably diluted Saudi backing for attempts to ignore Syria in the peace process, notably the 1985 Arafat-Hussein agreement to pursue negotiations with Israel. Iranian support was important in preventing Syria's isolation after Iraq joined Egypt in supporting this initiative (Bakhash 1990:120–121). Finally, in broad geopolitical terms, the alliance helped correct the vulnerabilities of Syria's position sandwiched between such more powerful and hostile states as Israel, Turkey and Iraq—especially in the absence of an alternative alliance with Egypt.

The isolation of Egypt from the Arab centre, the decline of Arab solidarity and Iran's de-alignment from Israel and intrusion into the Arab system, led to the final breakdown of the old power balance in which a relatively cohesive Egypt-led progressive Arab bloc counterbalanced Israel and Iran while keeping the traditional Arab states from straying too far from the Arab consensus. The relative bipolar-like stability of the region gave way to increased regional conflict in the 1980s and 1990s as rising powers (Syria), regional rivals (Iran, Iraq) or those insufficiently checked by countervailing power (Israel) pursued more assertive policies. Arguably, even if the Syrian-Iranian alliance was originally precipitated by specific threats—i.e., from Israel and Iraq—the breakdown of the Arab regional order helped solidify the alliance as one pole in an alternative regional system.

For a period in the late 1980s, it appeared that a new balance was indeed forming between the Syrian-Iranian alliance and the pro-Western Arab coalition (tacitly backed by Israel) generated by the Iran-Iraq war and in ascendance with Iraq's apparent war victory. The latter alliance was, however, too heterogeneous to survive the defeat of the common Iranian enemy. Indeed, it was split by separate institutional arrangements. The GCC spoke for the rich Arab oil states and paid little homage to Arabism; the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) aligned Jordan, the PLO and Yemen with a 'moderate' Iraqi-Egyptian axis. But the ACC started to unravel as Syria, struggling to get out of its Arab isolation and faced with a choice between Egypt and Iraq, chose Egypt as a partner, while Egypt, alarmed at Saddam Hussein's aggressive post-war bid for pan-Arab leadership, accepted Syrian overtures; their reconciliation blunted Iraqi ambitions. The Syrian-Iranian alliance also appeared under stress: Iran was unhappy with Syria's Arab reintegration resulting from its reconciliation with Egypt and acceptance

of the Saudi-brokered Taif agreement in Lebanon, though Tehran evidently accepted Syrian arguments that its new relations with Cairo would weaken Iraq (Stanley 1990:58).

The new threat to the Arabs posed at the start of the 1990s by the weakening of Soviet support, Soviet Jewish emigration to Israel, and an assertive Likud government allowed Saddam Hussein to make a strong bid for pan-Arab leadership through a policy of confrontation with Israel and the West. Buoyed by a widespread Arab perception that Iraq had the will and power to stand up for Arab rights, long-quiescent Arab nationalism began to stir, to the alarm of moderate Egypt and the GCC. Simultaneously, Iraq, with Iranian support, had launched a struggle to raise the price of oil by imposing production quotas in OPEC on the GCC, but Kuwaiti overpumping helped frustrate this bid. Thus Iraq was manipulating the two external forces which symbolize Western power in the Arab world, Israel and oil, to challenge the *status quo* and attempting thereby to 'organize the regional system' under Iraqi hegemony in defiance of traditional Western attempts to obstruct this. The weakness of this attempt lay perhaps in the deep cleavages between Iraq and the Syrian-Iranian alliance, natural partners in any new radical axis.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait set in motion yet another kaleidoscopic realignment of the Arab states. It precipitated a counter-coalition of Egypt, Syria and the GCC reminiscent of the early 1970s; but rather than dominating the Arab world, this axis faced a rival coalition of Iraq, Jordan, the PLO and Yemen. This checkerboard pattern of alliances, and the willingness of the anti-Iraq coalition to legitimize Western intervention against Arab Iraq appeared to be shaped by classic anti-hegemonic balancing. It was also a powerful reassertion of the 'Near Eastern game' (Brown 1984) in which local actors call on outsiders in violation of the more recent rules of pan-Arabism. But Iraq's relative success in mobilizing Arab public opinion against Western intervention, even among the publics of the anti-Iraq coalition, was a symptom of the continued permeability of the Arab states to transstate Arab-Islamic appeals. That pro-Saddam opinion was most effective in influencing governments where democratization experiments had begun (Jordan, Yemen, Algeria) suggested that the conventional equation of internal democratization and externally moderate foreign policies might be invalid for the Middle East. The legitimacy of the state system in the eyes of the public is profoundly compromised by the high levels of external penetration, of which the Western intervention against Iraq is an extreme case. To the extent to which Iraq's overwhelming defeat (as well as Syria's collaboration with the West) discredited Arab nationalism, other identities—state, substate and pan-Islamic—are likely to be the beneficiaries.

THE SYRIAN-IRANIAN ALLIANCE IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The dramatic changes in the global and regional systems at the dawn of the 1990s—the crumbling of Soviet power, the second Gulf war—presented a formidable challenge to the Syrian-Iranian alliance which had been forged in the very different environment of the 1980s. Its survival suggests that it is more deeply rooted than a mere ‘marriage of convenience’.

After Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Syria and Iran tried to coordinate their positions. Had the radicals still held power in Tehran, this might have failed, for some, led by Mohtashemi, urged Iran to ally with Iraq against the USA. However, this option was never seriously considered by the Rafsanjani regime and never won support among a war-weary public which blamed Saddam Hussein for their suffering in the only recently ended war with Iraq (*MEI* 25 January 1991; *MEI* 8 February 1991). Rafsanjani warned radicals that the US war machine could be turned against Iran. If Iraq succeeded in absorbing Kuwait, the power balance would shift against Iran: ‘the Persian Gulf would become the Arabian Gulf’ (*ME* March 1991). Iraq’s Arabism would eclipse Iran’s Islamic message and Iraq could dictate oil prices inside OPEC, turn its huge army towards Iran and force Tehran to maintain a costly arms race (*MEI* 31 August 1990). Siding with Iraq would have sacrificed the Syrian alliance. However, particularly after Iraq withdrew its remaining forces from Iranian territory, Iran’s perception of the Iraqi threat precipitously declined and was replaced by a preoccupation with Western intervention in the Persian Gulf region.

Syria, in joining the anti-Iraq coalition, believed that if Iraq succeeded in annexing Kuwait, it would be in a stronger position to capture Arab leadership and possibly entrap Syria in a war with Israel. But Iranian commentators were critical of Syria’s role in facilitating Western intervention. They belittled Syria’s claim that the deployment of Syrian troops in Saudi Arabia was an Arab substitute able to head off the permanent expansion of Western military influence in the area and observed that it gave the USA ‘Arab cover’ and helped contain radical opposition to the intervention. Iran was also aware Syria was exploiting its Iranian alliance to assume a role as mediator between Iran and the West which needed Iranian cooperation with the sanctions imposed on Iraq.

During his September 1990 visit to Iran, Asad sought to placate Iranian fears of Western intervention and alarm that Syria would abandon the alliance in favour of the pro-Western camp. While the Iranians argued that the coalition sought not to liberate Kuwait but to dominate the region and support Israel, Asad insisted that the cause of the intervention was the Iraqi aggression and once that was removed, the consequence—foreign

intervention—would also be removed. In order to maintain a face of public unity, Asad and Rafsanjani agreed to work for both outcomes. Rafsanjani insisted that their differences were those between friends over details (*SWB* 4 May 1991). Iran viewed the alliance as a critical counterbalance to the massive intervention of American power in the region (Emami 1995). Asad reputedly passed on US assurances to Iran that US forces would withdraw after Iraqi aggression was dealt with. A sign of the extent to which Asad brought the alliance, a putatively radical force, to support American policy in the crisis, was the call of their joint communiqué for an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait (which had given the pretext for the foreign presence in the region); it even criticized the ‘irresponsible policy of some Palestinian quarters’ in defending Iraq (*SWB* 22, 24, 27 September 1990, 18 December 1990). Syria was happy, in return, to defer to Iran’s insistence that Hizbollah not be disarmed in southern Lebanon as long as the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon lasted (*MEM* 30 April 1991).

Whether in response to Syrian urging or not, Iran made the decision to use the crisis to prove its moderation and responsibility to the Western powers by observing the sanctions against Iraq. Iran used the opportunity to lecture the West that the crisis had resulted from its policy of building up Iraq and weakening Iran, a pillar of regional order (*ME* March 1991). President Rafsanjani tried to use Iran’s moderation to re-establish ties with Saudi Arabia, a demonized rival under Khomeini, with whom Iran now sought to share hegemony in the Gulf region (Ehteshami 1993). The stand the alliance took against Iraq was a watershed in overcoming the distrust of the GCC states. Syria acted as a bridge between Iran and the GCC states and, for the first time since the revolution, they started to view Iran as an acceptable partner in Gulf security (Emami 1995).

When Iran’s radical opposition urged the President to exploit the Shi’ite uprisings against Saddam Hussein to advance the spread of revolutionary Islam, Rafsanjani demurred; he was more interested in showing Iran’s moderation and was fearful that Turkey would, in such an event, seize the north of Iraq. Syria and Iran expressed a shared interest (as it turned out, with Turkey, too) in the integrity of Iraq and opposed any Western-sponsored Kurdish state at its expense. The disintegration of Iraq could set off a power struggle over the spoils which the three agreed to avoid. The precedent would be extremely dangerous for their own territorial integrity for, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, it had become apparent that ‘the cancer of partition knows no borders’ (*al-Hayat* in *MEM* 30 April 1991).

Thus, the crisis demonstrated the continued convergence of Syrian and Iranian interests. The two states shared an interest in the weakening of Saddam. They both wanted to exploit the fluidity of alignments the crisis

caused to situate themselves at the centre of the post-crisis Middle East order, for which, given Soviet weakness, they would need some acceptance from the West. They shared an interest in seeing Western forces depart while projecting the image of responsibility needed to be taken seriously as pillars of Arab and Gulf security. As states, Syria and now even revolutionary Iran had a certain natural interest in regional stability which brought them to oppose the break-up of Iraq. Both had subordinated revisionist ideology to a *realpolitik* which sought spheres of influence and recognition of their roles as leading regional powers.

However, the total Western victory over Iraq opened the door to a US-led attempt to impose a New World Order in the Middle East whose main features included security of Gulf oil supplies for the West, military superiority of Israel, containment of Islamic fundamentalism and minimization of the regional power of Iran, Iraq and, to a lesser degree, Syria.

Within the Middle East system itself the power balance had also shifted. Syria and Egypt were strengthened at Iraq's expense; Iran, too, initially benefited from the reduction of Iraq and some greater willingness of the Gulf countries to accept it as a counter to Iraq. However, the war also brought Turkey more overtly into regional politics, arguably as a counter to Iran.

Perhaps most significantly, the war, in demolishing Iraq, weakening the PLO, splitting the Arabs and distancing the GCC from Arab nationalism, shifted the power balance most in Israel's favour. While the war also restarted the moribund peace process and cast doubt on the doctrines which favoured Israeli retention of Arab lands, namely, that of security from strategic depth and the notion of Israel as an American strategic asset, it was unclear whether, given Israel's great military superiority, this was enough to give it an interest in an equitable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this fluid and threatening situation, Syria and Iran continued to need each other.

Perhaps the strongest testimony to the strength of the Syrian-Iranian alliance was its survival despite Syria's Westward tilt and its adherence to the Damascus Declaration which joined Syria, Egypt and the GCC states (the '6+2' group) in an exclusively Arab Gulf security pact. This raised the prospect of the resurrection of the Egyptian-Syrian-Saudi triangle as a new Arab axis which could render the Syrian-Iranian alliance obsolete. Iran was indignant over its exclusion from this Gulf security pact and alarmed at Syria's incorporation into an arrangement institutionalizing the pro-Western coalition. *Kayhan International* asked how Syria could join a camp that for years wanted to topple Asad for his hostility to Israel and his progressive policies; it saw the Declaration as a US attempt to balance Iran

and viewed Syria's role in it as 'unnatural'. The Iranian press asked whether Damascus would submit to the American will, serve its interests in the Gulf and abandon the Arab-Israeli conflict just to get financial backing from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. The *Tehran Times* believed that if the Declaration merely resulted in financial assistance for Syria, it was tolerable but that any security arrangement in the Gulf which excluded Iran was doomed (*MEM* 1 March 1991; *Resalat* in *MEM* 7 March 1991; *SWB* 9 March 1991).

Asad, seeking to placate Iran, called for its inclusion in the '6+2' group. Presidents Asad and Rafsanjani jointly declared that Gulf security was the responsibility of the regional states, including Iran, and that the foreign presence was unwelcome. Syria used its improved relations with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states to persuade them that Iran was not a threat. Iran, in turn, dropped its opposition to the Damascus Declaration and its Deputy Foreign Minister expressed satisfaction in Damascus with Iran's improved ties to the Gulf states. In the event, the choice by the Gulf states of security treaties with the West completely undermined the Damascus Declaration and largely removed the conflict of interest between Syria and Iran. Egypt, in promoting PLO-Israeli negotiations at the expense of Syria, would, before long, prove an unreliable partner capable of replacing Iran. The practical failure of the Damascus Declaration to generate an effective regional axis, in leaving the Arab world more fragmented and penetrated than ever before, reinforced the rationale for the Syrian-Iranian alliance.

Nevertheless, the continuing meetings of the Damascus Declaration states could still become occasions of strain on the alliance. When Syria signed the Damascus Declaration foreign ministers' conference 1993 communiqué backing the United Arab Emirates' sovereignty, disputed by Iran, over the small Persian Gulf islands, particularly Abu Musa, Iran was angered. The Iranian press blamed this on Syria's need to keep Arab Gulf diplomatic backing during its negotiations with Israel and its desire for financial favours: Syria, the press believed, had chosen the wrong path of appeasement, that of Washington, the reactionary Arab regimes, Israel and Turkey: 'Instead of adopting anti-Iranian positions, Syria would be better off fighting alongside Iran in a common front capable of altering the present balance of power in the Middle East' (*MEM* 26 October 1993, p. 23). An enduring result of the second Gulf war has been to give Syria an enhanced stake in relations with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states which it will not willingly jeopardize for the sake of Iran.

Despite these strains, the ability of Syria and Iran to coordinate and reconcile their policies in the Kuwait crisis and to weather the aftermath showed that the alliance had survived the strains of the 1980s and the systemic transformations of the early 1990s intact. Enhanced Israeli

superiority, parallel with the collapse of the USSR, the defeat of Iraq, Syria's adherence to the anti-Iraq coalition and the greatly heightened Western penetration of the region, might have been expected to produce a 'bandwagoning' effect (in the terms of international relations theorists) which would align Syria Westward and isolate Iran; however despite Syria's subsequent entry into the US-sponsored peace process, it showed no interest in abandoning the Iranian alliance. On the contrary, Asad's visit to Tehran during the crisis, his first, was seen in Iran as a watershed in putting the alliance on a firmer basis of mutual trust (Emami 1995). It was also the occasion for a major step in institutionalizing it: the two states established a permanent higher committee, headed by Vice-Presidents Khaddam and Habibi and Foreign Ministers Shara'a and Velayati which would meet regularly and supervise the adjustment of mutual interests (*SWB* 7 November 1990).

Syrian and Iranian interests continued, in fact, to overlap. While the common Iraqi threat that initially cemented their alliance was eclipsed, the sense of threat from the West and Israel in which the alliance was born, persisted, especially after the Gulf war demonstrated the ability of the USA to intervene in the region in the absence of any countervailing Soviet power. Syria and Iran continued to see themselves as Western targets. Western campaigns for human rights and against terrorism were seen as singling them out, especially as Iran and Syria remained on the US 'terrorist list'. The Clinton administration's 'dual containment' policy closed the door on Iran's hopes of being accepted into the New World Order. Clinton's July 1993 missile attack on Baghdad was seen in Tehran as a symptom of a continuing American insistence on dominating the region and Iran condemned it as an 'act of pure barbarism and state terrorism'. It urged peaceful nations to end 'US leaders' unbridled hegemonism' (*MEI* 9 July 1993, p. 5).

'Dual containment' dovetailed with Israeli Prime Minister Rabin's campaign to revive Israel's status as a US strategic asset in the post-Soviet era by raising the spectre of an Islamic menace headed by Iran (Hader 1993). This actually enhanced the value of the Iran alliance for Syria by positioning it to swing between Iran and the Western-led camp to gain concessions in the peace talks, just as it had once tried to exploit Soviet-American rivalry in the region. Balancing served Asad's interest more than 'bandwagoning'.

Both Syria and Iran were alarmed by a perceived power imbalance in the region. US military power could now be deployed with little check. Israel enjoyed a nuclear monopoly and continued to receive sophisticated American arms while Syrian access to Soviet equipment was jeopardized. Even after the Gulf war, Iraq had more arms than Iran, while Saudi Arabia

and the Gulf Arab states were building up their high-tech arsenals. Syria and Iran began collaborating in the upgrading of their military technologies. Iran is reputedly financing North Korea's development of a long-range Scud which Pyongyang will provide to Iran and Syria. Iran and Syria were reported to be cooperating in the development of a cruise missile (*The Times* 12 November 1993). Former Israeli military intelligence chief General Uri Saguy has speculated that, were Iran to acquire nuclear weapons—though still a distant threat—it could not avoid nuclear cooperation with Syria (*MEI* 19 March 1993). Such cooperation is especially vital to Syria which lacks its own arms industry. As such, development of an armaments industry to fill some of the vacuum left by the loss of reliable Soviet supplies may constitute a new shared strategic interest underlying the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Given the Israeli nuclear monopoly in the region and perceived American threats to Iran, Syrian and Iranian attempts at acquisitions of arms, including weapons of mass destruction, are perfectly compatible with balance of power strategies and, in themselves, demonstrate no offensive intent. While the proliferation of nuclear weapons is potentially destabilizing, once one party (Israel in this case) obtains them, the resulting power imbalance encourages an arms race which can only likely be stabilized once a state of mutual deterrence is reached. Understandably, in Damascus, Tehran, and even pro-American Cairo, mutual deterrence is preferred to Israeli hegemony.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Syrian-Iranian alliance is bound to be affected by the evolution of the Arab state system. Perhaps the main problematic in the Arab power balance is the future of Iraq. The harsh treatment of Iraq by the UN, in contrast to Israel which has defied countless UN resolutions, is perceived by many in the Middle East as evidence of Western double standards which reinforces latent anti-Western public sentiment. It may also be putting down roots of revisionism among the Iraqi generation who are experiencing their political formation under this external siege. While Iraq is currently much reduced in power, it remains the Arab state with the most significant and diversified power base and it faces little Arab countervailing power in the Gulf.

Iraq could still become a bone of contention for the alliance instead of a problem shared between Iran and Syria. As long as Saddam is in power, Asad must fear Iraqi revenge, while Iranian-Iraqi relations have shown signs of improving and a *détente* between them is not out of the question, as the renewal of high level contacts in June 1995 illustrates. However, while Iran is perhaps comfortable with a weakened Iraq, if Iraq recovers its power under Saddam Hussein, the Syrian-Iranian alliance is likely to play a key role in

balancing it, to the benefit of regional stability. If Saddam fell, the two might end up quarrelling over the successor regime; although Tehran and Damascus have tried to coordinate the Iraqi opposition, Iran has patronized the Shi'ites while Syria wants the anti-Saddam movement to be in the hands of the Sunni-dominated army and Ba'th party (*MEM* 22 January 1992, p. 15). Nevertheless, the alliance might play a key role in preventing the disintegration of Iraq during a succession crisis if it provided the means of coordinating cooperation between Iraqi Ba'this and Shi'ites and in containing Kurdish succession. Syria and Iran appeared, in fact, to be jointly seeking to establish an alternative to the main Iraqi opposition group, the Iraqi National Council, which they believed to be following a US-inspired agenda (*MEI* 25 August 1994). Were such efforts to succeed, the fall of Saddam could open the door to a tripartite alliance of Syria, Iran and Iraq.

Other internal political changes in key regimes could shift the Arab power balance, too; and to the extent to which either democratization or Islamization advance, pro-Western elites may be under pressure to move their foreign policies closer to those of the Iran-Syria axis. This is all the more so since the regional system—afflicted by great economic disparities, soft oil prices, mass political disillusionment and the prospect of much-increased Israeli and Western penetration—may lack the legitimacy to give it staying power should the external Western power supporting it be seen to falter. Whether these factors combine to revive radical ideologies most probably depends on the outcome of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Indeed, while an Arab-Israeli peace settlement could still precipitate bandwagoning in which all states, including Syria, align against Iran, the neglect of Arab and Islamic values and interests by the US-sponsored New World Order and peace process makes it equally possible that, sooner or later, an effective anti-imperialist countercoalition will arise. The Syrian-Iranian alliance is perhaps the most likely core of such a countercoalition. The effectiveness of such a countercoalition depends on whether its architects can make use of transstate loyalties such as pan-Arabism and Islam or whether the consolidation of regional states and regional economic integration under Western/Israeli hegemony spells the permanent eclipse of such political identities.

CONCLUSIONS

The Syrian-Iranian alliance was precipitated by a radical revision of Iranian foreign policy following a change in regime, expressing an effort to break out of earlier dependencies (of the Shah on the West), and heightened perception of threat from the West and Iraq. It thus conforms with the tendencies identified by Holsti (1982) for explaining realignments.

The durability of the alliance is primarily rooted in geopolitics and strategic considerations, above all, common enemies and threat-balancing. Indeed, it originated in response to mortally threatening invasions by enemy powers. Iran's need for Syria's support against the Iraqi invasion and Syria's need for Iran's help during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was the crucible of the alliance. It is quite compatible with realist theory's argument that power imbalances invite counterbalancing alliance formation.

The outcome is also compatible with realist theory's reliance on power balancing to check hegemony and maintain stability. The alliance (along with the USSR) balanced the Israeli-American coalition in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion and the pro-Iraq coalition during the Iran-Iraq war; in both cases revisionist (Israeli, Iraqi) ambitions were blunted, much as balancing theory predicts. While the goals of Syria and especially of Iran had revisionist as well as defensive thrusts, because they balanced states with at least equally revisionist tendencies, the alliance, arguably, helped maintain the regional *status quo*. The alliance continues to represent countervailing power against Iraq, Israel and the penetration of the regional system by hegemonic (Western) power. In particular, the alliance was a natural reaction to the fragmentation of the Arab world in the 1980s in which no hegemonic regional power or axis sustained an Arab order and much of the Arab world was therefore increasingly dependent on and vulnerable to Western power. Their current collaboration in arms acquisition is largely a defensive reaction to the post-Gulf war military imbalance. Asad has affirmed that 'the alliance with Iran is part of ensuring a power balance in the region' (*Time* 30 November 1992).

The case demonstrates, however, that systemic factors do not wholly predict alliances. When the power balance leaves choices, ideology may determine outcomes. Under different leaders with contrary ideologies, Iran saw alliances with Israel and Syria as alternative ways of balancing Iraq. Syria was an unsuitable ideological partner for the Shah and Israel was anathema for Khomeini. Conversely, the shared anti-imperialism and anti-Zionist ideology of Ba'thist Syria and Islamic Iran facilitated their alignment. Moreover, Iran needed, for largely ideological (but partly strategic reasons) to break out of its marginalization from the Arab world and the Syrian alliance served this end.

Their ideologies, Arab nationalism and revolutionary Islam, reflecting dissimilar internal regimes, did diverge on state-building issues, notably over Iranian attempts to export an Islamic state. However, such ideological contradictions have been reconciled because the two ideologies overlap in their preoccupation with foreign threats and because strategic interests have converged so sharply. And under Rafsanjani, export of the revolution has ceased to be an issue in the alliance.

By comparison to systemic factors, domestic politics models, which view foreign policy as used to manage internal threats, carry limited weight. The alliance hardly advances internal legitimization for either state. Moreover, there appear to be no domestic constituencies in either country which have a strong stake in it. Indeed, in Iran there were elites (e.g., Montazeri) who expressed hostility to Syria; Majlis majorities reflected resentment over cheap oil deliveries. In Syria, there is pro-Iraqi sentiment in the Ba'th party which might be activated when Asad departs the scene. The alliance is an invention of the dominant elite factions, while, at the base of the two polities, rival Arab and Iranian nationalisms potentially divide the two states (Hunter 1985). If Alawi-Shi'a sectarian affinity carries any weight at all, it is only because it pulls in the same direction as strategic interests. Nor is the argument that Syria, a *rentier* state once removed, must sell its foreign policy for rent and that Iranian oil purchased the alliance, very convincing; Syria arguably gave up as much rent as it acquired. This does not mean that the domestic priorities of decision-makers cannot also be served by foreign policies primarily aimed at strategic priorities. Decision-making reflects complex, not single-factor explanations.

Indeed, the concept of omni-balancing, if revised to give equal or greater weight to external threats, captures the complexity of elite calculations. For Syria, the alliance helps balance Israel, gives leverage against Iraq and the Gulf states and diversifies arms access. It enhances Syria's leverage over the United States, notably in the peace process. It reinforces access to the Lebanese Shi'a, a crucial proxy in the struggle for Lebanon and to Islamic groups generally, which helps contain domestic Islamic opposition and could be a card in the peace process. The alliance also diversified Syria's access to external economic resources.

For Iran, the alliance helped balance Iraq and gave an Arab partner crucial to mitigating Arab-Persian polarization and as an intermediary with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. It also facilitates access to the Shi'ites in Lebanon and to the Arab-Israeli conflict, both crucial to the revolutionary legitimacy on which internal stability partly depends. The Syrian alliance obstructs Western attempts wholly to isolate Iran in the region. Syria also provides an arms production and trading partner of modest importance.

The strengths of the alliance lie in factors identified by Snyder (1984): their common enemies, the balanced—not lopsided—benefits each derives from it, a certain institutionalization and, arguably, some intra-elite trust rooted in the experience of each that the other came to its aid when it was most in need of it. Weaknesses in the alliance were most manifest in the mid-1980s when Syria objected to the spread of Islamic revolution and Iran resented this as well as Syria's manipulation of its need for Syrian

support in the Arab world—a temporary imbalance against Iran in the relative need of the two states for the alliance. As Yaniv's (1987) observations on the ephemerality of Middle East alliances suggest, the durability of the Syrian-Iranian alliance is no automatic function of systemic factors and these strains could well have ruptured the alliance; leadership rationality—in putting longer-term strategic interests over short-term gains, in building up trust, in institutionalizing consultation—has been essential to alliance durability; this is also more evidence of the rational actor model's utility in explaining Syrian and Iranian foreign policy.

If the alliance rests chiefly on common geopolitical interests, similar ideologies and elite rationality, rather than domestic interests, it could be quite vulnerable to changes in the former. Elite change could dilute the militant nationalism that has thrown Iran and Syria together and isolated them from other alignments. If Asad, the geopolitician, created the alliance, his successors, trying to consolidate power internally, may be far more attentive to its domestic liabilities. There are also certain signs of divergence in strategic interests, notably Syria's incorporation into the anti-Iraq coalition and the peace process. So far, bandwagoning—Syrian realignment with the global hegemonic powers in the wake of Soviet collapse and movement towards Arab-Israeli peace, thereby isolating Iran—is not in evidence. This could change should the peace process succeed. On the other hand, if the peace settlement, failing to resolve the Palestinian problem, turns out to be more of an extended truce, Syria will still need Iran. Even if it is more equitable, if it means the increased penetration of the Arab system by non-Arab actors, notably Israel and Turkey, and the eclipse of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic ideologies by separate state ideologies, then state interests and power-balancing will take on increased weight in regional foreign policy. In such a scenario, the Iran-Syria axis may continue to make strategic sense.

6 The Shi'a and the struggle for Lebanon

The struggle over Lebanon was a microcosm of the struggle for the Middle East since its civil war opened Lebanon to external intervention, producing a complex kaleidoscope of interaction between a mosaic of internal factions and external forces. In good part, this struggle pitted Israel (backed by the USA) against Syria and Iran. The struggle for Lebanon is most usefully understood, not as part of a civilizational conflict between Islam and the West, but as a conflict of national interests: if Israel could control Lebanon, it could smash Syrian and Palestinian resistance to its hegemony. Syria and Iran sought to make Lebanon, respectively, a buffer and a front in the struggle with Israel.

But Lebanon was not a mere passive arena and the political mobilization of the Lebanese Shi'a was the key to shifting the balance of forces against Israel and the USA. What began as the hesitant self-assertion of a deprived community transmogrified the Shi'a into a radical force in the 1980s which presented Israel and the West with its seemingly most implacable and effective enemy in the Arab world. How did this happen? It is best understood, not as a function of some immutable Shi'a radicalism, but in terms of the concepts used to explain social movements and peasant wars elsewhere in the Third World. But the particularly intense anti-Western, anti-Zionist twist it took, far from being inevitable, was largely self-inflicted by the miscalculations of decision-makers in Israel and Washington.

THE ROOTS OF SHI'A ACTIVISM IN LEBANON

The Shi'a of Lebanon have a transnational tradition, tying them to Shi'a in Iraq and Iran. Identifying with Shi'a holy cities such as Najaf, Karbala or Qom rather than Damascus, they historically lacked a strong tradition of Arabism. The Shi'a elite, indeed, acquired a stake in Lebanon when, during the French mandate, their Ja'fari School of Law acquired official recognition in a separate Lebanon; hence they were not part of the largely Sunni

movement to unite with Syria and the Shi'a zuama supported an independent Lebanon. Their identification with the central pan-Arab cause, the struggle against Zionism, is a recent phenomenon (Olmert 1987:189–192; Stanley 1990:47).

However, the Shi'a were grossly neglected by the Lebanese state and poorly represented in it: only 3.6 per cent of top bureaucrats were Shi'a in 1955 and the Shi'a south lagged far behind in infrastructure (schools, roads, health care). Shi'a villages fell into crisis: the majority of land was owned by a few big families (the As'ads, Himadehs, etc.) while sharecroppers and smallholders were indebted and dispossessed. As peasant agriculture declined while population increased, there was a massive movement out of agriculture into 'services' and wage labour. The fastest-growing sect, Shi'a were at the bottom on all socio-economic indicators. They were initially the least politicized Lebanese community until urbanization raised consciousness of their inferior position and made them available for political mobilization. After 1970 the conflict with Israel in southern Lebanon drove many from their villages into Beirut slums where they would provide many of the rank and file for civil war militias. Migration to the oil countries or Africa spawned a small Shi'a bourgeoisie which saw its access to power and wealth blocked by the Lebanese establishment while education produced a radical intelligentsia ready to lead the community against the *status quo* (Nasr 1985:10–12; Olmert 1987:190–193).

The Shi'a did not, however, form a political monolith. Indeed, in the long absence of a Shi'a party, disaffected youth joined the Lebanese left, particularly the Communists and, to a lesser degree, the Nasserites, the Ba'th or the Syria Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) (Olmert 1987). Shi'a who rose to leadership in Leftist opposition groups included I'sam Qansu of the Lebanese Ba'th Party, Muhsin Ibrahim of the Communist Action Organization and Karim Muruwwa of the Lebanese Communist Party. On the other hand, after the 1982 Israeli invasion, the feudal za'im, Kamal al-As'ad, would align with the Maronite Phalanges Party, playing a pivotal role in recruiting Muslim parliamentarians to vote for the elections of Bashir and Amin Gemayal as presidents (Hiro 1988a; Olmert 1987:221–225).

The Shi'a were first mobilized as Shi'a by Musa al-Sadr's Movement of the Dispossessed, later known by the acronym for its militia Amal (Lebanese Resistance Detachments or 'hope'). Al-Sadr, born in Qom, son of an ayatollah of Lebanese descent, came from a family of Lebanon's Jabil Amil with branches in Iraq and Iran. Lebanese Shi'ism had a tradition of emulating Iranian Shi'ism and so Musa al-Sadr was welcomed back to Lebanon and was never considered an outsider. But Lebanese Shi'ism is not just an offshoot of the Iranian version. Nor was al-Sadr a fundamentalist: Norton has described his views as closer to the Iranian Islamic modernist Ali

Shariati than to Khomeini's (Norton 1990:122). Al-Sadr had no desire for Islamic revolution, merely wanting equality for the Shi'a in a pluralist Lebanon, a goal he believed was bound up with the integrity of the Lebanese state. In spite of this, al-Sadr's movement was sectarian in the sense that it was rooted exclusively in the Shi'a. Indeed, Sadr was a principal leader in the emergence of a distinct Shi'a consciousness and in the creation of a Higher Islamic Shi'a Council separate from the Sunni establishment which institutionalized this distinctiveness (AbuKhalil 1990:2).

Amal rose from the crisis of the Shi'a community, notably the insecurity and impoverishment in the south. Its base was cross-class, embracing the impoverished peasantry, the dispossessed urban migrants and the frustrated Shi'a bourgeoisie seeking a place in the system. Its enemies were identified as the feudalists, those monopolizing political power in Lebanon, the monied exploiters of the dispossessed and the Israelis who coveted the land and water of southern Lebanon. Al-Sadr demanded protection from Israeli raids, for which the government had abdicated its responsibility, improved living conditions in the south and a fairer share of political representation, government jobs and development expenditures (*ibid.*: 2; Gendzier 1989:23; Nasr 1985:12–14; Norton 1984b; Norton 1985a; Olmert 1987:189–201).

Al-Sadr set out to challenge both the Shi'a feudal leaders (*zuama*) and the Lebanese Left for the loyalty of the Shi'a. The failure of the *zuama* to address the problems of the Shi'a, indeed, their exploitation of their own people, discredited their leadership while migration and education weakened feudal ties; in 1975 the movement forced the resignation from parliament of the greatest Shi'a magnate, Kamal al-As'ad. Al-Sadr's leadership grew out of the mass meetings, marches, petitions, strikes, civil disobedience and religious festivals through which he demanded Shi'a rights. Identifying himself with the Imam, invoking Hussein's martyrdom against injustice, deploying Shi'a religious symbolism and ritual, walking barefoot among the Shi'a crowds to dispense *baraka* (blessing), leading mass 'collective vows', he forged a charismatic bond with his followers. His mass rallies attracted 70,000–100,000 people, unprecedented for Lebanon, and by 1975 the movement was recognized as pre-eminent in the Shi'a community, with both the Shi'a Left and smaller Shi'a notables gravitating into its orbit (Deeb 1988:683–684; Nasr 1985:13–14). By then mass protests were making its challenge to the Lebanese establishment very real.

Facing the prospect that, as civil war approached, the Shi'a alone would be unarmed, and badly needing a means of self-defence in the south, al-Sadr founded the Amal militia. Trained and armed as an ally against Israel by the PLO and the Syrian-backed Palestinian movement, al-Saiqa, and initially a member of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), in 1976

Amal turned against Kamal Junblatt and the LNM and sided with Syria's attempt to impose an end to the civil war. Al-Sadr saw the war as victimizing the Shi'a and backed Syria's moderate reform proposal to end it. He also warned the PLO against establishing a state within a state in Lebanon and blamed its cross-border shellings of Israel (instead of infiltrating into it) for Israeli retaliation against Lebanese villages in southern Lebanon. Al-Sadr's political standing diminished as a result of these positions. Amal was sidelined by the LNM in the 1976 fighting and many Shi'ites continued to fight in the LNM militias (Norton 1984a; Norton 1987).

Several factors revived Amal. The disappearance of Imam al-Sadr made him a martyr figure analogous to the vanished Imam of Shi'a tradition. Amal was boosted by the increasing need of southern Shi'a for a self-defence organization to counter the PLO presence in the south. The southern Shi'a were turned against the PLO owing to the damage to Shi'ite villages wrought by Israeli retaliation for PLO guerrilla activities, especially in the 1978 Israeli invasion, and due to an increased perception of the PLO/LNM as an occupation force. Syrian patronage was also crucial to Amal's survival (Norton 1984b; Norton 1987).

By 1981 Nabih Berri had emerged as leader of Amal. The son of a trader living in Africa, a former Ba'thist, and a lawyer who had spent time in the USA, Berri steered Amal along a secular path. Berri faced opposition in Amal, in part over his reluctance to sponsor an Iranian-style militant Shi'ism (Deeb 1988:686; Norton 1987). Moreover, given the dispersion of the Shi'a, Amal was inevitably decentralized and regional leaders retained some independence of Berri and pulled the policy of the movement in conflicting ways; for example, Dawud Dawud, Amal's southern boss, maintained correct relations with the Israelis while Zakariya al-Hamza of the Bekaa sympathized with Hizbollah and its sharp hostility to Israel (AbuKhalil 1990:11–13; Deeb 1988; Norton 1987).

The ideology of Berri's Amal expressed Shi'a middle-class hostility to Lebanon's 'feudalists' whose domination of the political system it sought to challenge. It also expressed a drive among the Shi'a for security and inclusion through a modern secular Lebanon. The Shi'a, being more dispersed than other Lebanese sects, would be more threatened by a break-up of Lebanon—the so-called 'cantonization' advocated by the Maronites; thus, during the civil war, Amal called for re-establishment of the Lebanese state, the disarming of militias and the return of the army to the south. It demanded reform of the confessional system which it saw as destroying Lebanese national identity, but its proposed reforms were moderate. It accepted Syria's 1976 '50–50' formula on the allocation of parliamentary seats between Christians and Muslims. It did not even challenge the Maronite monopoly of the presidency and only asked that civil service jobs be

awarded by merit. It celebrated Lebanon's cultural diversity but sought to promote a 'tolerant melting pot' and a common Lebanese patriotism (Bailey 1987:230–236; Deeb 1988:684, 689–692; *ME* June 1985, pp. 21–24; Norton 1984b; Norton 1990:122).

While Amal started out as an all-embracing umbrella movement, its conflict with Hizbollah more clearly differentiated its special constituency in the Shi'a community. Amal came most accurately to represent the views of those southern Shi'a who wanted relief from the struggle with Israel and of the upwardly mobile middle class. Some of its leaders could be considered *nouveaux riches*. Shi'a university students may be taken as a surrogate for Amal's middle-class constituency and their views as reflective of its thinking. A 1980s' survey of Shi'a students studying in the USA showed that only 3.4 per cent wanted an Iranian-type state while a survey at the American University in Beirut found that 52 per cent preferred a system which would institutionalize sectarian pluralism. Most Shi'a realized that any attempt to create an Islamic republic would mobilize the rest of the population against them (*MEI* 6 August 1993; Norton 1990:122–123; US Congress, Statement of A. Richard Norton to Congress 1985).

THE SHI'A AND THE 1982 ISRAELI INVASION OF LEBANON

It was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which radicalized Lebanese Shi'ism and made it a force of regional, even international importance. Shi'a were the main force Syria used to expel the Israelis and the multinational force after the invasion. They also dealt the body blow to Amin Gemayel's US-backed regime, which forced it to annul the Israeli-Lebanese accord of 1983 (Hiro 1988a; Rabinovich 1991; Wright 1988:63–66).

This is ironic, since, in the first weeks of the invasion, Shi'a in the south assisted the Israeli effort to drive out the PLO. Amal, determined not to allow a PLO return to the south, would thereafter have secured Israel's southern border for it. But instead of dealing with Amal as an independent force, Israel tried to harness the Shi'a by co-opting the Shi'a zuama and recruiting Shi'a into its client militia, the South Lebanese Army (SLA). Amal, alienated by this tactic, obstructed Israeli recruitment in the south. The SLA has never been more than around 10 per cent Shi'a and Shi'a recruits to Israel's village militias were marginal or criminal elements or were conscripted by force. In short, Israel failed to harness the Shi'a community (Norton 1984a; Norton 1985a).

Instead, Israel's 'iron fist' occupation policy alienated and radicalized the Shi'a as a whole. It punished their villages for resistance actions by mass detentions, destruction of orchards, curfews, house searches and

road-blocks. Israel was blamed for the invasion's disruption of life and for flooding markets with Israeli goods. Its arrest of Shi'a sheikhs, venerated community leaders, inflamed the population, as did the brutality of the SLA. The catalyst which ignited generalized resistance was the Israeli clash with participants in the holy Ashura ceremonies in Nabatiya in 1983 (Petran 1987:322–323; Stork 1985; Wright 1988:64).

Resistance took the form of boycott of Israeli goods, strikes, protest meetings and, finally, armed struggle. The majority of attacks on Israeli forces were by Shi'a from the same villages that had welcomed the invasion (Norton 1985a). Israel's realization of this accelerated its withdrawal from Lebanon but it now feared that the Shi'a, having been radicalized, would not now be satisfied by withdrawal. Yitzak Rabin admitted: 'If we eliminated PLO terrorism only to replace it with Shi'a terrorism, we have to wonder about this war' (Petran 1987:374). While it faced one enemy, the PLO, before 1982, Israel had now created new enemies. As a defence against this, it insisted on preserving its self-styled security zone in the south but, ironically, this zone would be the precipitant of continuing clashes with the Shi'a (*ibid.*: 323–325).

Initial resistance to the Israeli invasion came from the Left—the Lebanese Communist Party, the Organization of Communist Action, the SSNP rather than Amal (*ibid.*: 372). In the south, Amal's passivity was challenged by local sheikhs and by the nascent Hizbollah which, with Iranian support, assumed the leading role. After the Nabatiya incident, the Shi'a Mufti Muhammed Mahdi Shams al-Din, issued a *fatwa* calling for resistance and depriving collaboration with Israel of legitimacy (Norton 1985a). As Amal's radical rivals were strengthened, it was gradually forced to join the resistance. Berri was also turned against Israel by such events as the heavy Israeli bombing of Shi'a neighbourhoods of Beirut during Israel's siege of the city. He suspected Israel planned to stay in the south, as it appointed civilian governors and promoted the expansion of SLA control over southern villages. But it was only after Amal's 1984 break with the Gemayel government that it became fully involved in the resistance (Bailey 1987:330–335).

The Gemayel government, in accepting the Lebanese-Israeli agreement of 1983, had become implicated in the imposition of a pro-Israeli order in Lebanon. Southern Shi'ites initially supported the agreement as the price of Israeli withdrawal, but those in Beirut and the Bekaa Valley were opposed, evidence that Shi'a political attitudes are shaped by their regionally differentiated experience and interests rather than some uniform religious-cultural disposition to opposition or martyrdom. These different responses help explain Berri's equivocations on the agreement. He did not initially join the Syrian-sponsored anti-Gemayel 'National Salvation Front' (NSF),

trying, instead, to balance and mediate between the NSF and the Gemayel government and straining Amal's ties with its main patron, Syria.

But Amal was gradually driven into opposition to Gemayel. It was alienated by his unconcern for the integrity of the south as the Israelis built extensive, seemingly long-term fortifications south of the Awali river. Gemayel showed little interest in a Shi'a alliance and, secure in his Israeli and American backing, rebuffed even the moderate reforms the Shi'a wanted. If the Maronites could not maintain their dominance of the Lebanese state, they wanted cantonization, a formula damaging to the Shi'a; considering the southern Beirut suburbs a part of 'Marounistan', Gemayel's Phalanges militia tried to expel Shi'a from the area. Since, simultaneously, the Druze were fighting against the Maronite forces which Israel had introduced into their Shuf homeland, an anti-Gemayel Druze-Shi'a coalition took form (Bailey 1987:225–236; Petran 1987:315–316).

The alienation of the Muslim sects gave Syria an opportunity to arm and mobilize a counter-coalition to break Gemayel's government or make it turn away from Israel. Druze victory in the Shuf shifted the balance of forces against Gemayel. The subsequent US intervention on his behalf made it a partisan in the civil war. The consequent attacks on the US Marine barracks and the US retaliatory air strikes against Druze and Syrian positions a few days after an American strategic accord signed with Israel, provoked bombardments of US Marine emplacements and the retaliatory US naval strikes against the Druze mountains (Petran 1987:316–322). Thus, the intimate connection between local, regional and international forces in a highly penetrated state and regional system threatened a rapid escalation of a local conflict to the international level.

Gemayel's attempt to seize control of West Beirut, backed by US support, precipitated the fight with Amal. It was with reluctance that Berri, a partisan of state institutions, ordered Shi'a soldiers to desert the newly American-trained and equipped Lebanese army; when this led to the collapse of the army, the battle was over. The USA and Israel withdrew from Lebanon. Syria and Amal had forged an alliance in opposition to the USA, the Phalanges and Israel which would prove remarkably enduring (Bailey 1987:219–236; *ME* March 1985, pp. 9–12, June 1985, pp. 21–24; Petran 1987:348; Seale 1988:414–418).

IRAN IN LEBANON: THE SHI'A AND THE SYRIAN-IRANIAN ALLIANCE

Revolutionary Iran had a major stake in Lebanon. It saw Lebanon as the most promising prospect for spreading the Islamic revolution to the Arab world, allowing it to leap the wall of containment set up by Iraq and the

Gulf Arab states (Ramazani 1986:180–185). In the words of former Iranian ambassador to Lebanon, Hojjatoleslam Fakhr Rouhani, Lebanon is 'a platform from which different ideas have been directed to the rest of the Arab world'; as such 'an Islamic movement in that country will result in Islamic movements throughout the Arab world' (Vaziri 1992:4).

Iran also saw Lebanon as a front from which Israel and the USA, the main enemies of the revolutionary ayatollahs, could be damaged and a permanent position on Israel's back door established from which Iran could carry on a holy war (Ramazani 1986:180–185). The successful Islamic resistance to the Israeli invasion was seen as the second great Islamic victory after the Iranian revolution itself: no other force could compete with militant Islam in its demonstrated ability to roll back US and Israeli military power (Bakhash 1990:125–126; Fuller 1991:119–135).

Dissatisfied with Amal, Iran played a direct role in founding the rival Shi'a movement, Hizbollah. Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the Iranian ambassador to Damascus in the 1980s, reputedly directed the effort. Iranian Revolutionary Guards set up camp in the Bekaa Valley and provided military training, arms and leadership for the resistance to the Israelis in the south. Iran has continued to provide financial subsidies, Hizbollah acknowledges Iranian leadership and its leaders are periodically received in Tehran (Norton 1990:126–127; Vaziri 1992:6–7).

The ease with which Iran entrenched itself in Lebanon is due to several factors. Iran used pre-existing connections to Lebanese Shi'a clerics to urge their sponsorship of Hizbollah. These relations go back to Safavid times when the Ottomans saw Lebanese Shi'ites as part of a pro-Safavid fifth column, persecuted them and forced many to migrate to Iran (Fuller 1991:119–122). Lebanese Shi'a mullahs often received their education in the Shi'a holy cities of Iraq or Iran, where they developed personal relations with Iranian patrons—an example of the transstate ties typical of a region where state frontiers are very recent or porous. Iran's current foothold in Lebanon revives this tradition.

But Iran would have had little chance of mobilizing a significant pro-Iranian political movement capable of competing with the Lebanon-centric Amal without the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and Tehran's alliance with Syria. The invasion gave Iran an opportunity to champion the Lebanese and Syria welcomed Iranian assistance in resisting the Israelis (Ramazani 1986:178–183; US Congress, 1985, Statement of Shahrough Akhavi). Lebanon's Shi'a responded to Iran for multiple reasons. Iran claimed to champion the 'deprived masses' and this corresponded to the Lebanese Shi'a's perception of their historical experience, while Iran's revolution was a model of how such people could overpower a militarily powerful oppressor. Iran encouraged the idea of martyrdom and salvation for those

killed in the resistance, an activism at odds with the quietism and *taqiyya* (dissimulation) dominant among Shi'a in normal times but reviving a latent tradition more appropriate to a time of troubles. Iran provided financial assistance to the families of those martyred in the resistance. Finally, Iran practised what it preached, as the Revolutionary Guards provided credible leadership in resistance to the invasion (Norton 1990:122; Ramazani 1986:181–183; Vaziri 1992:1, 7–8).

The Iranian impact on the Lebanese Shi'a was profound. Mohsen Rafiqdoust (1987:5–17), Minister for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards bragged: 'We infused the Lebanese Shi'a with the spirit of resistance, and if the US intervenes it will be taught a lesson like in Vietnam'. Iran also helped neutralize the anti-Palestinian bias institutionalized in Amal and shifted a part of the Shi'a from their previous preoccupation with their rights inside the Lebanese system to countering the external enemies of Islam.

The Syrian-Iranian alliance was forged in good part out of their common front against Israel in Lebanon, but Syria and Iran also had different, not always compatible, objectives and both the strengths and strains in their alliance were perhaps most manifest in the Lebanese arena. While it is an exaggeration to call them 'friendly enemies' (Fawat 1986), they were engaged in 'a delicate dance for advantage in Lebanon without destroying their overall strategic alliance' (Stanley 1990:61).

Iran's agenda in southern Lebanon in the 1980s only partly coincided with Syrian interests. Iran sought to make southern Lebanon its front in a crusade against Zionism; Syria also sought to harness anti-Israeli Shi'ite activism in southern Lebanon to pressurize Israel, yet needed to rein in challenges likely to provoke Israeli intervention. Iran rejected UN Resolution 425 on south Lebanon, even though it called for unconditional Israeli withdrawal, while Syria supported it (*MEI* 12 September 1986). Iran saw south Lebanon as a base from which to torpedo any Arab-Israeli settlement while Syria sought such a settlement. Hizbollah struck at the French contingents of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) (largely because of the French tilt towards Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war) which Syria valued as a buffer against Israel (*MEI* 12 September 1986, p. 3; Nasrallah 1990; Norton 1990:118).

While Iran patronized Hizbollah, Syria, seeing it as both a threat and an opportunity, had a much more ambivalent and sometimes quite hostile relation with it. Marius Deeb (1988:697) claims that Syria invented its differences with Hizbollah to get Western approval for its pacification of Lebanon. It would be more correct to say that Syria so exploited very real differences it had with Hizbollah. Syria sought to both restrain Hizbollah's taking of hostages and use it to demonstrate to Washington that an end to

such anti-Westernism depended on Syrian-sponsored pacification in Lebanon and acknowledgement of Syria's interests. Iran had little interest in these aims (Harris 1986).

While Syria supported a secular pluralist regime in Lebanon, Iran initially harboured ambitions to establish an Islamic republic. These were, however, soon discouraged by Tehran's main Lebanese ally, Sheikh Hussein Fadhallah. An Iranian-style Islamic republic in Lebanon was never likely, since the large Christian community strongly opposed it, most Sunnis would not accept it and even Lebanese Shi'a were divided over the issue. Syria, wanting a multisectarian secular state, would not have permitted a radical Islamic republic on its doorstep (Norton 1990:116–117; Vaziri 1992:14).

Since Rafsanjani, Iran's Lebanon policy has increasingly deferred to Syrian interests in Lebanon and to the views of more moderate Lebanese such as those represented by Amal. But its interest in Lebanon survives the moderation of its radical ideology because clerical ties persist, because a constituency has been mobilized that wants Iranian support (all other Lebanese factions having patrons), because its Lebanese presence is part of the strategic alliance with Syria and because Lebanon is the one success in the effort to export the Islamic revolution which even Iran's pragmatists cannot abandon without giving ammunition to radical critics (Fuller 1991:119–135). Iran's ties to Hizbollah and to the Shi'a clergy in Lebanon remained close in the mid-1990s. The Iranian embassy in Damascus received regular visitors from them and when Iranian dignitaries, such as Foreign Minister Velayati and Vice-President Habibi visited Damascus, they invariably received the whole Shi'a hierarchy of Lebanon (*SWB* 14 December 1993).

THE 'SHI'A AXIS' AGAINST THE WEST: THE ISSUE OF TERRORISM IN LEBANON

The issue of the terrorism over which Lebanon's Shi'a community, Iran and Syria confronted the West in the 1980s is a major test of the nature of the conflict over Lebanon and indeed the Middle East. The kidnappings, hijackings and bombings of American and Israeli targets in Lebanon were depicted by some analysts as a function of Shi'a religious extremism in league with 'terrorist states'—Iran and Syria. Daniel Pipes (1984) publicized the view that the kidnappings were part of an Islamic civilizational struggle to expel Western values and influence from the Middle East. Because these claims are so one-sided, they are fundamentally misleading.

This is not to deny that a portion of Lebanese Shi'a were recruited into highly anti-Western groups which looked to Iran for leadership. There were some 27 groups in Lebanon, two-third Shi'a and arguably affiliated with Hizbollah, reputedly involved in terrorism in the 1980s. Islamic Jihad

alone claimed 27 actions and took responsibility for the US embassy bombing (Ramazani 1986:188–194). The Organization of the Oppressed of the Earth claimed six. Hizbollah was blamed for the TWA hijacking. Many were involved in kidnapping Western hostages (Norton 1990:128).

However, the evidence refutes the claim that Lebanese Shi'ites are anti-Western religious fanatics. Hilal Khashan's survey of Shi'a students at Lebanese University found that only 24 per cent were highly religious, and though it is these who tended to be Hizbollahis, they were less anti-Western than secular-minded nationalists or Leftists. Hostage-taking was disapproved of by 91 per cent of the whole sample. Only 36 per cent saw Western political systems as inimical to Shi'a, though 89 per cent said Western countries were not interested in dealing with the Shi'a in a friendly way. Seventy-five per cent wanted normal relations with the West. Twenty-eight per cent blamed the USA, 27 per cent Israel and 28 per cent Syria for the civil war. Among Hizbollahis, more blamed Syria than the USA, although this survey was taken at a time of Hizbollah-Syrian clashes. But Khomeini's message portraying the USA as the 'Great Satan' clearly had not had a deep impact, at least not among this more highly educated group of Shi'a (Khashan 1989).

The origins of Shi'a hostility to the West are, by all evidence, rooted not in cultural differences but in the Western projection of political and military power into Lebanon and the Middle East on behalf of Israel and against Islamic Iran. The USA gave the frustrated Shi'a of Lebanon multiple occasions and reasons for blaming it for their troubles. It was the US role in supporting Israel's imposition of a separate peace and an extremist Maronite government on Lebanon in 1983 which initially made America and the West a target of Shi'ite terrorism. According to Hussein Musawi of Islamic Amal, the suicide bombers attacking Israeli and Western targets were the orphans and widows created by US policy and the Israeli invasion (Petran 1987:330; Wright 1988:63–68).

It is not usually realized that the hostage-taking in Lebanon began when the Maronite Phalanges kidnapped four Iranian diplomats during the Israeli invasion; at the same time, the Israelis also abducted thousands of Shi'a and Palestinians. The bombing of the American embassy annexe in Beirut in 1984 was provoked by the US veto of the UN Security Council resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon (Vaziri 1992:5). Ambassador Herman Eilts points out that the TWA hijacking was precipitated by US toleration of the Israeli kidnapping of 700 south Lebanese hostages and was an attempt to force the USA to put pressure on Israel to release them (US Congress 1985, Statement). The hijackers also mentioned the bombing of the home of Hizbollah spiritual leader, Sheikh Fadhallah, by CIA-trained agents in which 70 people were killed in the Shi'a quarter of Beirut.

Other terrorist acts were motivated by Shi'a rage at Western favouritism towards Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.

Hizbollah's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Muhammed Hussein Fadhallah, put terrorism in a broader context as perceived by the Lebanese Shi'a. Violence in the Middle East did not, he insisted, originate in any Islamic mentality but from objective conditions imposed by an oppressive great power. It was not the Lebanese that started the violence; rather, Israel's dispossession of the Palestinians was the root of the Lebanese civil war and the civil war was greatly exacerbated by the 1982 Israeli invasion which was supported by the USA in order to smash the PLO and the Islamic movement and reinforce Israel. The US Marines were attacked because they took sides in Lebanese politics. When people have nothing to lose they will resort to extraordinary means, Fadhallah argued: 'Oppressed people cannot always behave in a reasonable manner... The weak will fight to defend their interests, even if they have to use knives and stones to spread chaos throughout the world'. But Islam teaches that violence is only a last resort in exceptional circumstances. Fadhallah was against all kidnappings:

I might sympathize with the cause of the kidnappers but not the means they use because many of the Americans they are seizing are participants in cultural, medical and social institutions and cannot be held responsible for the actions of their government.

(Fadl Allah 1985)

Fadhallah was, however, accused by the USA of having issued the *fatwa* justifying hostage-taking. He reputedly saw it as a means of breaking the Arabs' psychological fear of the US superpower (*Issues* February 1994).

As for the charge that Syria and Iran are terrorist states, the evidence is strong that they exploited Shi'a hostility to the USA in order to encourage anti-Western violence. What is questionable is its characterization as part of a generalized ideological assault by these states against the West. Also problematic is the extent to which the factions involved in the kidnappings acted under instructions from Tehran—and much more so from Damascus (Bakhash 1990:126). It is certainly true that the two states tolerated kidnappings and were capable of ending them when they thought it in their vital interests. On the other hand, in the TWA hijacking, Asad played a key role in resolving the crisis and enlisted Rafsanjani who, according to US intelligence, 'talked tough' to get the release of the hostages (Ramazani 1986:188–194). Iran's role probably varied over time depending on whether radical or pragmatic factions had the upper hand in Tehran and Lebanon. Thus, the radical Iranian leader responsible for founding Hizbollah, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, defended hostage-taking as a kind of poor man's

weapon against great powers (*ME* December 1990). Iran certainly used the hostages to get arms, to try to extract its frozen assets from the USA and perhaps to deter US intervention against it in the Persian Gulf war with Iraq. Iranian leaders, engaged in rivalries at home, were not prepared to invest political capital in securing hostage releases without some quid pro quo from the West.

Syria was open in its support for guerrilla actions against Israeli forces in Lebanon which it justified as national resistance, but it publicly eschewed kidnappings and its lack of full control in Lebanon allowed it plausible deniability (Seale 1988:468–469). Certainly Syria sought to exploit the hostage situation to acquire leverage over Western policy in the Middle East and Lebanon for specific and limited objectives. Syria's ability to manipulate the hostage situation was a deterrent against US or Israeli revenge for their humiliations in Lebanon at the hands of Syria's proxies. Syria also wanted the USA to cease trying to exclude it from the peace process, accept its role in Lebanon and acknowledge it as crucial to regional stability. Syria could have curbed Hizbollah by cutting off arms and money, but not without paying some political cost which it would only do for a quid pro quo (*MEI* 11 July 1987; US Congress, 1985, Statement of A.R.Norton). Syria tried to take credit for the individual hostage releases; beginning with the TWA crisis, Asad sought to make the point that only it could stabilize Lebanon which, as long as it remained in chaos, would be a breeding ground of terrorism (*ME* August 1985, pp. 17–20). The US role towards the end of the 1980s in mediating between Syria and the Gemayel government indicates that Asad was able to convince the USA to cooperate with his effort to pacify Lebanon. As Syrian pacification advanced, Syria's tolerance for kidnappings and bombings declined.

Finally, terrorism in Lebanon was a function of the global power balance. The ignominious American withdrawal from Lebanon made it appear that the USA, deterred by the USSR from bringing its full power to bear there, could not easily retaliate for terrorist acts. The collapse of Soviet countervailing power and the demonstrated US prowess unleashed against Iraq raised doubts about whether Lebanon would remain a secure refuge for terrorists. Just as crucial, however, the collapse of bipolarity, the Gulf war and the peace process secured Syria's partial reintegration into the New World Order; this was incompatible with continuance of the hostage crisis. Similarly, with the end of its war with Iraq, Iran had less need of leverage over the West and the hostage crisis was an obstacle to the foreign investment Rafsanjani needed for post-war reconstruction. Once Syria and Iran calculated that the kidnappings no longer suited their interests, they sought the hostages' release. The terrorist groups could not simply be turned on and off by these states, since they had their own distinct interests. Thus, the captors linked the hostage release to

that of Israeli Shi'a prisoners which complicated and delayed a resolution. Iran could not simply order the hostages' release but had, itself, to negotiate with the factions holding them and reputedly had to threaten Hizbollah with a cut-off of financial support if they were not released (*Asharq al-Awsat* in *MEM* 14 August 1991; *ME* September 1991, pp. 5–10). Thus, when acting in concert and determined to get results, Syria and Iran proved effective in 'closing the hostage file'.

Shi'a 'terrorism' was far less a civilizational struggle against the West than an exceptional and largely defensive reaction against hostile Israeli and American actions in Lebanon which massively disrupted the normal life of the community. Syria and Iran undeniably manipulated Shi'a frustrations to unleash a Machiavellian 'low-intensity warfare' which sometimes victimized innocent civilians. But their motivation was largely the defence of vital national interests or regional autonomy against exceptional external penetration. Such tactics were hardly unique to them and are regularly practised by states who see their national security at risk, not least by Israel which victimized Lebanese innocents on a massive scale. The category of 'terrorist' state is largely a tool manipulated for political agendas in the USA and Israel.

THE LEBANESE SHI'A AND THE SYRIAN DRIVE FOR HEGEMONY IN LEBANON

Syria and Israel had been locked in a struggle over Lebanon since the start of the civil war. The 1984 Israeli withdrawal seemed to open the door to a Pax Syriana in Lebanon. However, imposing hegemony on a fragmented society took more than the partial retreat of Syria's main antagonist. By 1986 Syria was struggling to shore up its position as the coalition it had mobilized against the Israeli invasion began to fall apart, as the Maronites renewed their resistance to Damascus and as Arafat's PLO tried to re-establish a presence after having been driven out during the invasion. Unable or unwilling to impose its hegemony militarily on an increasingly fragmented Lebanon, Syria sought to use the various Lebanese factions against each other and to exploit the anarchy they created to make its peacekeeping rule indispensable. The Shi'ite community was potentially its most important ally. Amal, indeed, proved to be Syria's most consistently reliable surrogate. However, in the mid-1980s, the Shi'a split between Amal and the pro-Iranian radical Islamic Hizbollah. Hizbollah would, until the 1990s, prove more an obstacle than an aid to Syrian ambitions in Lebanon. But Syria's alliance with Iran gave it potential leverage over Hizbollah and ultimately its deft exploitation of Amal-Hizbollah rivalries gave it control over both movements.

The Syrian-Amal alliance had roots going back more than ten years earlier. Imam al-Sadr had done Asad a signal service when, in 1973, as Asad faced a Sunni fundamentalist challenge at home, he sponsored a declaration by the Lebanese Shi'a that the Alawis were a part of the Shi'ite community, hence real Muslims (Seale 1988:352). In return, Syria helped al-Sadr create the Amal militia. Once the Lebanese civil war started, Syria initially sought to rely on secular-nationalist surrogates, particularly the pro-Syrian branch of the Lebanese Ba'th Party and the Syrian-dominated Palestinian al-Saiqa movement. However, most Lebanese Ba'thists were loyal to Iraq and hence hostile to Syria and al-Saiqa was discredited in Lebanon by its involvement in the looting of the Beirut banking district; both were repressed by the PLO and LNM during Syria's 1976 intervention and never really recovered. Syria's intervention alienated many of its ideological allies among the Lebanese Sunnis and its repression of the Sunni Islamic rebellion in Syria in the early 1980s (which the Lebanon intervention had helped stir up) further inflamed Sunni distrust. Syria had, therefore, increasing need for a reliable Shi'a ally. Moreover, the Shi'a, as their demographic plurality was politically organized, attained a power which made them an attractive substitute for other potential alliances (AbuKhalil 1990:5-6, 11; Deeb 1988:687; *Washington Report* July-August 1993).

Many Shi'a, for their part, viewed the Syrian alliance as in their interest. Amal shared Syria's distrust of the PLO and its opposition to the Maronites' drive towards cantonization; it supported Syrian proposals for the reform and reconstruction of Lebanon (*ME* June 1985, pp. 21-24). Many Lebanese Shi'a saw Syria as the ally of Shi'a Iran in the war with Iraq which they also distrusted because of the conduct of its Palestinian surrogate, the Arab Liberation Front, in southern Lebanon. While Syria therefore clearly took advantage of the Shi'a's sectarian distinctiveness, nothing is added to the rationale for the alliance by some supposed sectarian affinity of the Shi'a and Alawis (AbuKhalil 1990:1-20; *MEI* 23 January 1987; Norton 1984b; Norton 1987).

Syria's relation with Amal suffered a setback when Amal initially collaborated with the Israeli invasion at a time when Syria was desperate to mobilize the southern Shi'a against it. But once Amal came into conflict with Israel, the alliance with Syria was restored. Besides their common anti-Israeli front, Syria and Amal shared an interest in preventing a re-establishment of Arafat's PLO in southern Lebanon. Since Israel would not permit Syrian forces to enter the south, Damascus relied on Amal to help control the area (Deeb 1988:686-687; Norton 1990:125-126; Petran 1987:315).

Amal needed a patron and arms supplier to play a credible role in Lebanese politics and it was bolstered by Syrian arms and heavy weapons.

In the mid-1980s Amal sought to dominate west and south Beirut as part of a power struggle with the Sunnis who had relied on PLO protection; as such, it wished to prevent a PLO resurgence in the Beirut Palestinian camps. The Syrian drive for hegemony in Lebanon and its parallel attempt to control the Palestinian card, translated into a similar determination to prevent the resurgence of Arafat's power. The coincidence of their interests allowed Syria to make Amal a main instrument of its anti-PLO drive in the so-called 'war of the camps'. Amal failed in its May-June 1985 drive against the Palestinian camps, in part because Syria's other clients, the Druze and radical Palestinians sided with the PLO, an outcome indicative of the low level of legitimacy this attempt enjoyed. Undeterred, Syria gave Amal 50 tanks in July 1985, making it a seemingly formidable force (Petran 1987:361-368). But, in subsequent campaigns, it was not much more successful.

Eventually, an agreement ended the conflict satisfactorily from Syria's point of view: not Amal but pro-Syrian Palestinians were left in control of the Palestinian camps. Amal was discredited for its pro-Syrian role in the conflict; this made it all the more dependent on Syria, indicative of which was Berri's residence in Damascus from November 1986 until the Syrian return to West Beirut in February 1987. The camps conflict had also produced strains in the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Iran, which wanted a concerted Palestinian-Shi'ite offensive against Israel, sent envoys to stop the Amal-PLO clashes which Syria tacitly backed. In the second episode of the war of the camps (April 1986), Hizbollah, which rejected Amal's attempt to pacify the southern border with Israel, aligned itself with the PLO.

Syria increasingly came to see resurgent Islamic militancy as another major obstacle to its drive for hegemony in Lebanon. This put further strain on the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Hizbollah had a long-standing, albeit ambivalent relation with Syria. In the early 1980s it rendered Syria immense services in the struggle against the Israeli occupation, Western multinational forces and the Gemayel government (AbuKhalil 1990:14). But after Amal joined Syria against Israel, Syria had less need of Hizbollah and tried to rein it in as early as 1984. Syria believed Hizbollah's Islamic vision to be incompatible with the pluralistic secular Lebanon it sought to reconstruct. Hizbollah was fiercely independent of Damascus but Syria needed control over it in order to calibrate the pressure of Shi'ite resistance against Israel in the south (*MEI* 20 December 1995; Norton 1988a:43-49; Norton 1990:132-133).

Syria first clashed with militant Islam in Tripoli, a stronghold of Sheikh Sha'ban's Sunni fundamentalist movement, Tawheed. Sha'ban's movement was intensely anti-Syrian, having taken in many refugees from Asad's repression of the Ikhwan in Hama. Sha'ban, a Sunni convert from Shi'ism,

had close ties to Iran, whose revolution he proclaimed as Islamic rather than specifically Shi'ite, and with Lebanese Shi'a clerics, which he pursued in the name of Islamic unity (*ME* November 1994). Tawheed had imposed an Islamic regime in Tripoli against the resistance of pro-Syrian Alawi and heavily armed Shi'a Communist militias. Arafat's retreat to Tripoli from Syrian-backed Palestinian rebels, where he received Sha'ban's backing, brought on a Syrian-backed siege of the city in 1984. Later, Tawheed's kidnapping of Soviet advisers directly challenged Syria which renewed its proxies' siege of the city. Hizbollah sided with Tawheed and the Iranian press denounced Syria's actions against Tripoli as a war on Islam (*CSM* 3 October 1985; *MEI* 21 March 1986; Wright 1988:59–61). Syria was nevertheless able to get Iranian intervention on behalf of a truce in the city. Sha'ban, Hizbollah leaders and Iranian mediators went to Damascus where a cease-fire was arranged and Syria was allowed to deploy peacekeeping troops in Tripoli. This is a classic example of how Syria used divisions among Lebanese forces, and Iranian mediation, to extend its control in Lebanon (Norton 1990:118).

When Syria's first attempt to reconstruct Lebanon in agreement with the traditional zuama failed and it resorted to the tripartite agreement of 1986 among the leaders of the three main Maronite, Druze and Shi'ite militias, Amal was a pillar of the project. But Iran denounced any agreement with the Maronites who were, it charged, American and Zionist agents and Hizbollah contested Amal's right to represent the Shi'a (Harris 1986; *MEI* 10 January 1986). Asad's March 1986 declaration that Syria's relations with Hizbollah were at their lowest indicated his rising frustration at Hizbollah's independent agenda (*MEI* 21 March 1986).

With the collapse of the tripartite agreement, Syria attempted to extend its power in Beirut through security agreements under which small numbers of elite Syrian troops would patrol the city with Lebanese army units and allies like Amal, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the Lebanese Ba'th party (*MEI* 27 June 1986). Syria was able to exploit the fear of the Sunnis, who lacked their own militia, of rule by the Shi'ites and Druzes, in order to extract an invitation to return to the city. But Hizbollah's Sheikh Fadhallah denied there was any need for Syrian forces in the Shi'ite southern suburbs.

Hizbollah, backed by Iran, continued to support the PLO against Amal in the late 1986 round of the war of the camps. At the same time, it was pushing southwards from the Bekaa Valley onto the turf of other militias in order to open up a front with Israel; Syria used its resulting clashes with Amal and the pro-Syrian SSNP to further insert 'peacekeeping' troops. In March 1987 Syria seized the opportunity of fighting, in which Amal was badly pressed by a Druze-Communist-PLO coalition, to enter West Beirut

in strength. But this was only a first step in re-establishing its control in Beirut, and the Hizbollah-dominated southern suburbs remained as outside its sway, as was Christian East Beirut (*CSM* 10 July 1986; *ME* October 1986; *MEI* 11, 25 July 1986, 6 March 1987).

Moreover, as Syria tried to use Amal-Hizbollah clashes as an excuse to extend its control to West Beirut, it clashed directly with Hizbollahis, killing 20 and inflaming the movement against it. Iran reacted angrily: Ayatollah Montazeri sent letters to the Lebanese ulama calling for punishment of the Syrians and Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi charged Syria with wanting to annihilate the Islamic resistance movement (*MEI* 6 March 1987). Rafsanjani, however, claimed that Asad did not authorize the shootings and it was clear there were divisions inside the Iranian leadership, with the pragmatists much more prepared to tailor patronage of Hizbollah to Syria's needs in Lebanon (*ME* April 1987). Rafsanjani apparently prevailed, for a Hizbollah statement declared that the interests of the Islamic revolution dictated extreme restraint in the crisis (AbuKhalil 1990:16).

Syria contemplated a drive into the southern suburbs to discipline Hizbollah. It would have liked to be able to deliver the hostages held there as a way of enlisting US support of its attempts to pacify Lebanon, but there was the risk they would be killed. Moreover, Iran warned a move against Hizbollah could jeopardize the alliance; 'no other country has as much influence in Lebanon as Iran', warned Foreign Minister Velayati. Without Iran's good offices, Mohtashemi told Damascus, Hizbollah could be unleashed against Syria, and then, he said, 'there would be nothing we can do for you' (*MEI* 6 March 1987, pp. 3-5, 11-12, 20 March 1987). Asad replied that those who are against imperialism and Zionism must accept Syrian leadership in Lebanon. But Vice-President Khaddam admitted that a regionally isolated Syria needed the Iranians, and it refrained from entering the suburbs.

Syrian relations with Iran and Hizbollah were increasingly strained over the Western hostages. The June 1987 seizure of Charles Glass undermined the credibility of Syria's claim to be establishing security in Beirut; 7,500 Syrian troops encircled the southern suburbs and Syrian road-blocks confiscated Hizbollah arms, inspected Iranian diplomatic cars and tightened the flow of arms to the Revolutionary Guards in Bekaa; Syria was showing that Iran's proxies in Lebanon operated at its sufferance (*ME* September 1987; *MEI* 27 June 1987).

Syria also clashed with Iran and Hizbollah in the spring of 1988 over the kidnapping of the American Colonel Higgins in the south. Ayatollah Montazeri rejected Asad's appeal for Higgins's release. In response, Asad enlisted Amal, which also opposed antagonizing the USA, to crack down on Hizbollah, splitting the Shi'a community and inflaming the radicals in

Tehran. The fighting between Amal and Hizbollah came close to a surrogate battle between Syria and Iran. Syria's Amal ally defeated Hizbollah in south Lebanon but when it extended its drive into southern Beirut, Hizbollah turned the tables, wiping it out there. This put Hizbollah contiguous with Palestinian camps and Maronite east Beirut, posing the threat of a potential new anti-Syrian axis (*MEI* 5 March, 14, 28 May 1988).

Syria now clearly made the decision to cut Hizbollah down to size. Iran's opposition was blunted by appeals of the Shi'a community, suffering from the Amal-Hizbollah warfare, for Syria to stop the fighting. Once Syria showed it was determined to assume control of the southern suburbs, Iran and Hizbollah tried to get favourable conditions. Asad assured Hizbollah leaders Syria would not repress Hizbollah or take Amal's side; Hizbollah had to be off the streets but was not disarmed. Syria's June 1988 entry into the Shi'a suburbs met no resistance. Its presence put Syria in a better position to press for and take credit for hostage releases in return for US intervention with the Maronites on behalf of the Syrian pacification of Lebanon (Hiro 1988a:8–12; *MEI* 11 June 1988).

Amal-Hizbollah clashes continued, having taken on their own momentum rooted in deep bitterness from previous battles. Hizbollah insisted it must have positions in the south and freedom against Israel but Amal rejected this. Iran tried to mediate but was itself split: Mohtashemi backed Hizbollah but Rafsanjani blamed both sides equally: thus, the Iranian power struggle was reflected in Lebanon (*MEI* 2 December 1988, 20 January 1989; Norton 1990:118). However, when shortly thereafter the Rafsanjani-Khamenei leadership consolidated itself, it worked to contain the conflict: Khamenei consistently advocated Shi'a unity and warned he could not consider those opposing a solution as 'belonging to us' (*SWB* 4 January 1990). The Iranian press complained that Syria was 'not blameless' for the divisions between the nationalist and Islamic forces in Lebanon and appeared indifferent to the importance of Hizbollah's role in the resistance to Zionism (*SWB* 11 April 1989). Nevertheless, Iran and Syria finally co-sponsored a settlement, the 1989 'Damascus agreement', between the two movements. Hizbollah was allowed a presence in the south on condition it exercise restraint in its operations. Iran leaned on Hizbollah to accept the deal in order to keep the Syrian alliance intact. Syria did not object to a controllable Hizbollah presence in the south to play off against Amal and to use against Israel. Thus, the Iranian alliance allowed Syria to balance and mediate between the two wings of the Shi'a movement, which it had itself helped to divide, making both beholden to it.

The importance of the Syrian-Iranian alliance was manifest in the willingness of Iran and Syria to compromise their differences over Hizbollah rather than jeopardize it (*MEI* 3 February 1989; Norton 1990:132–133).

Even when their objectives conspicuously diverged, they still needed each other: Syria needed Iranian support for its policy in Lebanon and Iran needed Syrian tolerance of its very presence there.

LEBANESE SHI'A UNDER IRANIAN MODERATION AND SYRIAN HEGEMONY

The death of Khomeini and the subsequent fall of the Iranian radicals opened the door to increasing Iranian-Syrian cooperation in Lebanon. Having dealt with the Hizbollah threat and brought the Shi'a community under its control, Syria now had to cope with Maronite resistance under General Aoun who was being supported by Iraq. Syria turned to the Iranian alliance to help counter Aoun as well as to strengthen it against Saudi and Arab League efforts to mediate the crisis at the expense of Syria's exclusive role in Lebanon (*MEI* 21 July, 4 August, 22 September 1989; *SWB* 28, 29 August 1989). Iraq's support for Aoun solidified the Damascus-Tehran axis. Iran assembled a remarkable anti-Aoun coalition in Tehran, including Amal's Berri, several Hizbollah sheikhs, Mahdi Shamsaddin of the Shi'a Higher Council, Druze leader Walid Junblatt, Palestinian radicals Abu Musa and Ahmad Jebril, Nasserites, Communists and even Sheikh Sha'ban of Tawheed, whose imprisoned followers were released by Syria. This nationalist-Islamic backing proved very useful to Syria: for example, Islamic warnings against possible French intervention on behalf of Aoun must have been a considerable deterrent against this potential threat to Syria. Unleashing Iran in Lebanon was also a Syrian way of warning Saudi Arabia and the Arab League that the alternative to Syrian pacification could be a far more alarming Islamic revolution and, arguably, frightened them into a Taif settlement which was far more acceptable to Syria than previous such proposals (Marschall 1992:440; *MEI* 6 October 1989).

When Syria accepted the Saudi-mediated Taif accord, isolating Aoun and legitimizing its role in Lebanon, relations with Iran were, however, strained. Under the accord, Syria would have to enforce the dissolving of the militias which could bring a clash with Hizbollah and Iran. Hizbollah called Taif an American plot and rejected its modest political reforms which institutionalized pluralism at the expense of Islamization. Syria's reconciliation with Egypt, breaking its Arab isolation and closer US ties growing out of American support for Taif, threatened Iran. Nevertheless, Iran remained anxious to preserve the alliance: Iran radio acknowledged that although Taif preserved an unjust system it could bring Lebanon much-needed stability while Velayati declared that Asad had assured Iran of his support for the Islamic/nationalist forces in Lebanon and, so long as

that was the case, Syria had Iran's support (*MEI* 17 November 1989; *SWB* 1 November 1989).

The weakening of the Iran-Syria alliance was nevertheless reflected in renewed 1990 Amal-Hizbollah clashes. Hizbollah was trying to better its foothold in the south for operations against Israel which Amal opposed. As the pro-Syrian SSNP and Syrian-oriented Lebanese Ba'th took Amal's side, Syria again seemed intent on cutting Hizbollah down to size (*ME* March 1990). In another remarkable factional realignment, Arafat's PLO put an end to Hizbollah advances in the south against its old enemy Amal, perhaps at Saudi bequest to head off an Iranian threat to Taif and with apparent Syrian approval. Hussein Musawi, leader of the pro-Hizbollah Islamic Amal, declared Arafat's intervention was aimed at straining the Iran-Syria relation and would fail because those ties were 'strategic and deep-rooted' (*SWB* 1 August 1990). In fact, Hizbollah and Syria came to terms. Syrian military commanders met with Hizbollah leaders under Subfi al-Tufayli who acknowledged Asad as 'a big brother to all men of the resistance' (*SWB* 3 October 1990). Hizbollah agreed to disarmament in residential Beirut. Syria let Hizbollah consolidate its southern presence to mitigate its opposition to Taif and to placate Iran. Syria and Iran again combined to end the clashes (*MEI* 5 January 1990; Nasrallah 1990:19).

The Western hostages had become a chronic strain in the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Syria wished to close the hostage file. Soviet power was collapsing and the USA was cooperating with Syria over implementing Taif against resistance by General Aoun. The restoration of order in Lebanon which Syria sought left no place for hostage-taking. Iranian leaders were split. Rafsanjani desired to negotiate an exchange of the hostages for US-held Iranian assets; Mohtashemi declared this would be like releasing hungry wolves and would be against Imam Khomeini's will (*MEI* 4 August 1989, 16 March 1990). However, a mere few days after his statement, Mohtashemi was ousted as Interior Minister as Rafsanjani consolidated his power. The pragmatists aligned Iran with the Syrian position. Sheikh Fadhallah called for the hostages to be released. Even out of office, Mohtashemi encouraged Hizbollah factions to rebuff Rafsanjani's efforts and Hizbollah insisted Israeli prisoners, including Hizbollah Sheikh Obayd, must also be released as part of a hostage deal. It became clear that Rafsanjani could not simply order Hizbollah to release the hostages and that Lebanon gave his radical opponents scope to oppose his policies. But, in time, he wrested control over the Hizbollah connection, reputedly warning that funding would be cut off and fostering a new more pliant Hizbollah leadership (*MEI* 11 May, 22 June, 1990; *MEM* 7 August 1991). Then, the climate of American invincibility created by the US victory over Iraq and Syria's alignment with the anti-Iraq coalition, cleared the way for the last hostage release.

Taif was only the first step in the gradual tightening of Syrian control over Lebanon. Maronite resistance to it was worn down by factional infighting between Aoun and the Lebanese forces. Then, buffered from Israeli reaction by its membership in the anti-Iraq coalition, Syria moved against Aoun, with troops and aircraft. Thereafter, the civil war was rapidly wound down and Syrian hegemony established. The Syrian-Lebanese Treaty was signed, the militias disarmed, including the PLO around Sidon, the Lebanese army rebuilt and, despite Maronite resistance, new parliamentary elections staged which consolidated pro-Syrian politicians in power. Syria continued to deny that the terms under which it was required to withdraw its troops from Beirut under the Taif agreement had been met: it seemed determined to keep hold of the 'Lebanese card' during the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations then beginning.

Besides Syria, the other winner from the pacification of Lebanon was, against all expectations, Hizbollah. Syria deferred to Iranian pressures, delivered by President Rafsanjani on a visit to Damascus in May 1991, to delay Hizbollah's disarming on the grounds that it was a resistance movement, not a militia, and should not disarm until the Israelis pulled out of the south. Syrian Vice-President Khaddam agreed that it was illogical to insist on disarmament of the Lebanese and Palestinians in south Lebanon when the Israeli-backed SLA remained armed and Syria 'advised' the Lebanese government to refrain from trying to disarm Hizbollah there. Hizbollah did have to disarm elsewhere and turn over the main army barracks in the Bekaa Valley to the Lebanese army. Amal, by contrast, was more fully disarmed, seemingly leaving Hizbollah as the dominant Shi'a movement; in so disarming its main proxy, Syria indicated it believed it could now control Hizbollah (*ME* February 1992). Syria's proxies in Lebanon, including pro-Syrian ministers, thereafter blocked initiatives by the Lebanese government to disarm Hizbollah in the south while nevertheless supporting government efforts to strengthen its authority against Hizbollah elsewhere.

These developments reflected a much more complex relation between Syria and Hizbollah. As early as 1988 there were reports that Syria was courting Hizbollah moderates against the hard-liners (*SWB* 3 December 1988). The end of Hizbollah's conflicts with Syria began with the death of Khomeini and the rise of the pragmatist Rafsanjani. As Syria's dominance in Lebanon was consolidated, mainstream Hizbollah leaders, encouraged by Rafsanjani, realized they had to adapt to Syria's power and struck a working alliance with Damascus: in return for Syria's support for its unique role at the head of the Islamic resistance in the south, Hizbollah would tailor its activities to serve Syrian strategy in the conflict with Israel. After the Gulf war heightened American power in the area, Hizbollah embraced the Syrian-Iranian axis as the only vital and effective force in the region

which enjoyed a degree of independence of American pressures (*SWB* 29 April 1991).

Hizbollah and Syria also needed each other against common enemies in the Lebanese political arena. Hizbollah's growing stake in the Lebanese political system after it won several seats in parliament, started to attach it to the Syrian-backed *status quo*. Hizbollah became increasingly deferent to Syrian policy: for example, it refrained from criticizing Damascus for moves it disapproved of, such as Syrian pressures on the PLO to return to the Middle East peace talks while the HAMAS expellees remained in Lebanon (*SWB* 14 April 1993). The rank and file of Hizbollah, however, still resented the Syrian role in Lebanon. Diversifying its options as ever, Syria gave backing to a moderate Sunni Islamic movement in Lebanon, the Islamic Philanthropic Society or 'Habashi group', which opposes more radical Islamists (*ME* November 1994). Even after a peace settlement with Israel, Hizbollah would continue to serve Syria's interest in resisting Israeli penetration of Lebanon, whether this took the form of commercial relations or of Israel re-establishing its alliance with the Maronites to gain influence in the Lebanese government.

The alliance with Iran had been crucial in the consolidation of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon. Rafsanjani used Iran's prestige and financial leverage to get Hizbollah to cooperate with Syria, release the hostages, and curb the fighting with Amal (Vaziri 1992:16). Iran accepts that Syria is the key to its own role in Lebanon. Symptomatic of this is the fact that Iran has only a *chargé d'affaires* in its Beirut embassy (which deals with consular services) while policy is made in Iran's Damascus embassy; there are no direct Iranian flights to Beirut: all Iranian-Lebanese connections lead through Damascus (*Washington Report* July-August 1993). Iran's deference to Syrian interests brought it to throw its weight on behalf of moderation in Lebanon. Tehran abandoned Khomeini's intention of using Hizbollah in a holy war against Israel even after it withdraws from southern Lebanon. Ayatollah Khamenei endorsed Hizbollah's post-Taif strategy of integrating into Lebanese politics.

HIZBOLLAH: FROM REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT TO POLITICAL PARTY

Origins

What exactly is Hizbollah? Until the civil war and invasion, it existed largely in the writings of Sheikh Muhammed Hussein Fadhallah, but these events became the crucibles of Islamic fundamentalism in Lebanon (Deeb 1988:692). They weakened such secular alternatives as the communists, the Lebanese National Movement and the PLO, while the collapse of

governmental authority created a political vacuum which the Islamic fundamentalist forces, resurgent region-wide, were well-situated to fill (Petran 1987: 354–355). The disruption caused by the Israeli invasion radicalized the Shi'a. The invasion also undermined Amal, which collaborated with Israel and, for a period with Bashir Gemayel who Shi'ites detested for his role in expelling them from their north Beirut neighbourhoods in 1975/6; this gave Shi'a clerics and more radical leaders opposed to Berri's moderate leadership the opportunity to promote an alternative (AbuKhalil 1990:14; Norton 1985a). Parts of Amal actually defected: thus, Hussein al-Musawi broke from Amal over its reluctance to fight Israel and with Iranian and Syrian help turned its Bekaa branches into Islamic Amal which became part of Hizbollah (Norton 1984a; Wright 1988:63). The invasion opened the door to an Iranian presence. The Israeli destruction of the Palestinian presence in southern Lebanon and maintenance of 'red lines' against Syrian encroachment there created a vacuum which Hizbollah would fill (Vaziri 1992:12).

Leadership

Hizbollah's leadership is quite distinct. While Amal is led by secular leaders who happen to be Shi'a, Hizbollah's clerical leadership mirrors that of the Islamic republic itself (*MEI* 6 August 1993). The education of most of its leaders in Najaf or Qom gives the movement powerful transstate connections without, however, making them any less Lebanese. Hizbollah's spiritual leader, Sheikh Fadhallah, comes from a south Lebanese village and, educated in Najaf, was a disciple of the Iraqi Shi'a leader Muhammed Baqr al-Sadr; perhaps as a result, he has always maintained his independence of Iran and resisted early Iranian attempts to push for an Islamic republic in Lebanon. His ideas were the major influence over the party programme decided in February 1985 and the announcement of the movement's establishment was made at the al-Rida mosque in Beirut where Fadhallah's preaching reaches the whole Shi'a community (Deeb 1988:692–693; *Issues* February 1994; Norton 1990:127–128).

Ibrahim Amin emerged as the first leader among the group of Fadhallah followers who formally founded Hizbollah. Sheikh Subfi al-Tufayli was the first Secretary-General in the late 1980s; he was long seen as Iran's man rather than Fadhallah's. Sheikh Abbas Musawi, a protégé of Fadhallah and backed by Iranian President Rafsanjani, was elected Secretary-General in 1991 and steered a moderation of policies, including ending the hostage crisis, but was assassinated by the Israelis in the spring of 1992.

Al-Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbollah's next Secretary-General, was a product of the Lebanese civil war, having been driven out of the Karantina

area of Beirut by the Phalanges as a teenager. He returned to his village near Tyre where he became an early disciple of Fadhallah and opposed Amal (for its supposed lack of militancy towards the Phalanges) as well as Left-wing parties operating among the Shi'a in the south. He then studied in Najaf until ousted by the Iraqi government (along with Khomeini and Abbas Musawi who were also resident there). Later he studied in Qom and Tehran, where he grew close to Khomeini. He returned to Lebanon where, amidst the Iran-Iraq war, he opposed Iraq's sympathizers. After the Israeli invasion, he helped Hussein Musawi detach Amal's Bekaa branch from Berri's control and worked closely with Ibrahim Amin in organizing Hizbollah. He served as Hizbollah's military chief and was prominent in the war against Amal. He was known as Khomeini's most faithful disciple ('Khomeini-Lubnan') and as a hard-liner aligned with Ali Akbar Mohtashemi. He was sidelined by Rafsanjani and kept in Tehran as Hizbollah's representative once Hizbollah took a moderate turn in the post-Khomeini era. There, however, he developed close relations to Iran's spiritual leader, Ali Khamenei. When Abbas Musawi was killed, Khamenei sponsored Nasrallah's election as Hizbollah Secretary-General, the first southerner to hold the post. Being loyal to Iran, he has continued the moderate policies desired in Tehran (*Issues* March 1992).

Table 3 Hizbollah leaders

Sheikh Muhammed Hussein Fadhallah
Ibrahim al-Amin, early pre-eminent leader
Sheikh Subfi al-Tufayli, Secretary-General in late 1980s
Sheikh Abbas Musawi, Secretary-General, 1991–1992
Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary-General after March 1992

Source: SWB 3 *October 1990, 25 May 1992.*

Ideology and worldview

Hizbollah is, first of all, a universalistic Islamic movement. As in Iran, its leaders reject the separation of religion and politics. Hizbollah's Shi'a religious leaders view themselves as the natural political leadership of the Islamic movement. They employ religious symbols, notably the martyrdom of Hussein, to mobilize the resistance of the 'oppressed' (Deeb 1988:694–695). Hizbollah accepted Khomeini as the deputy of the hidden Imam and divinely empowered to legislate; it considered itself under the guardianship of the jurisconsult (velayat al-faqih) which is universal (Deeb 1988:696; Vaziri 1992:11); thus, Hassan al-Nasrallah insisted that loyalty to Iranian Islamic leaders did not contradict Lebanese citizenship since Islam went beyond national borders (SWB 6 March 1992).

That Hizbollah was, in the first instance, a reaction to Western intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East is apparent from its founding manifesto, a 1985 'Open Letter' to the 'Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World'. It declares that the 'first root of vice is America' and the first imperative is the struggle against US imperialism (*MEI* 6 August 1993, p. 9). Islam and an Islamic state are the solutions to the Middle East's submission to such foreign powers. In the 1990s, Sheikh Fadhallah took a similarly grim view of the USA and the world order it was trying to impose in the Middle East; it was based on power, not justice, to which Muslims would never surrender. The West's chief goal, he insisted, was to exploit the Middle East's oil which it treated as if it were its own property. The absence of Soviet counterpower and the Western victory over Iraq had, he argued, opened the Middle East more than ever to American domination. In this supposed new order, the USA did not respect international law and had simply hijacked the UN for its own interests in the area.

As regards Israel, Hizbollah was rejectionist in principle, and initially envisioned a long-term crusade to liberate Jerusalem and Palestine (*ME* March 1990). It considered Arafat's recognition of Israel as treasonous, denounced the PLO-Israeli agreement of 1993 and condemned the Arab-Israeli peace talks (*SWB* 5 March 1992). Sheikh Fadhallah argued that Israel had no right to Palestine; 'we will not recognize Israel under any circumstances', he declared and insisted that Palestinians had the right to reclaim their homeland. Israel was America's spearhead in the Islamic world. The USA believed the Arabs were easy prey after the Gulf war and was bringing its power to bear to make the Palestinians accept Israel. But Hizbollah's resistance would endure—not for five but fifty years (Nadir 1985).

Fadhallah was, however, reputed to have told his followers in 1993 that, at least in the short term, Israel's existence had to be accepted and that, as a participant in the Lebanese political system, Hizbollah had the responsibility to consider Lebanon's interests when it challenged Israel (*Issues* February 1994). Since the second Gulf war, American power was unchecked and the Arab regimes were defeatist and under American influence. In these conditions, he conceded, 'we do not have unlimited capabilities' to fight Israel and advised Hizbollah to concentrate on the more realistic objective of liberating south Lebanon.

Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah insisted the peace process could only lead to 'an Israeli peace on Israeli conditions', putting Muslim oil, water and mineral resources in Jewish hands. Deputy Secretary-General Naim al-Qasim affirmed that if Israel withdrew from south Lebanon as part of the peace process, Hizbollah would continue to support the Palestinians, but the method would be left to the future to decide, i.e., it might take political rather than military forms. Nasrallah declared in 1994 that the

tasks of the liberation of Palestine should be shouldered by all Muslim peoples, implying that it was not a Hizbollah responsibility *per se* (MEI 18 February 1994; MEM 28 April 1994).

In a watershed 1994 policy change, Hizbollah declared that, in case of peace, it was prepared to disband its military wing, the Islamic Resistance, rather than be dragged into confrontation with the Lebanese army (or Syria). But resistance would not end and a peace treaty signed by the Lebanese government would not be binding on the people or on Hizbollah. Hizbollah's security organs would try to deter Lebanese from economic relations with the Israelis. 'In the war of normalization, we have several means to stop the Arab peoples from accepting the concept of ties with Israel'. In short, Hizbollah was trying to adapt rejectionist principles to the realities of the Middle East balance of power (MEM 15 February 1994).

As regards Lebanese affairs, while Hizbollah was committed to an Islamic state in Lebanon, Fadhallah acknowledged that it could not be imposed by force, only by conversion, and argued that the conditions were not right for it: unlike Iran, where the vast majority of people wanted a Muslim state, Lebanon was pluralistic and coexistence with non-Muslims was essential. Even a majority of Muslims, he admitted, opposed an Islamic republic. Yet he insisted that the confessional system which divided Lebanese had to end and he rejected putting a secular system in its place. His ideal model appeared to be the historic Islamic state in which Christians were allowed to regulate their own religious affairs but Muslims ruled (Nadir 1985).

Hizbollah opposed the Taif agreement as legitimizing unrepresentative Maronite dominance of the state. Hassan Nasrallah attacked Lebanon's 'inefficient government, rotten institutions, and incompetent officials busy dividing up the sectarian cake through nepotism' (SWB 15 April 1992). In practice, Sheikh Fadhallah supported Hizbollah's accommodation to the post-Taif order. Hizbollah, he said, supported the establishment of state authority, being against anarchy, even though it did not approve all the principles on which the state was founded (MEM 28 April 1994).

Factional politics and strategy

Through much of the 1980s, the main political rivalry inside Hizbollah seems to have been between Fadhallah's camp and those who looked to leadership from Iranians such as Mohtashemi, notably over such issues as the Islamization of Lebanon. After Khomeini died in 1989, the pragmatic Rafsanjani assumed power and Syria tightened its hold on a post-Taif Lebanon. Hizbollah was divided over how to adapt to these changing conditions. To forge a new policy, it held its first conference in Tehran where three tendencies emerged. Pragmatists led by Abbas Musawi,

Hussein Musawi and Subfi al-Tufayli favoured accommodation with Syria, resolution of the hostage crisis, and an end to the conflict with Amal; all were natives of the Bekaa where Syrian influence was predominant, but were also seen as aligned with the new Iranian leadership. Two other factions, presumably more under the influence of Hizbollah founder Mohtashemi, resisted aspects of this policy—one, including Nasrallah and Ibrahim Amin, opposed *détente* with Amal—while a third faction with roots in the Iraqi al-Dawa Party led by Naim al-Qasim and Hussein Kurami was also considered hard-line. Under Iranian pressure, Tufayli was elected first Secretary-General.

At Hizbollah's second conference in May 1991, the moderate tendency was reinforced through the election of Abbas Musawi as Secretary-General, although other factions remained well represented in the leadership, including the hard-liner Naim al-Qasim who was made assistant Secretary-General. The result was a series of policy compromises: Hizbollah joined the Lebanese political system but remained its main opposition and critic; its armed militia was disbanded in south Beirut and the Bekaa but it remained the only armed Lebanese party in the south. It carried on the resistance there but in deference to Syrian objectives and it opposed the peace process without attacking Syria's role in it. Most important, it accepted that Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon would bring an end to armed guerrilla activities against it (*Issues* March 1992).

The election of Hassan Nasrallah as Secretary-General in 1991 did not alter the moderate line and policy of accommodation with Syria. Despite his former association with the hard-liners and his reputation as a southerner more independent of Syrian influence than the Bekaa leaders, he did not challenge Syria. He was elected with Iranian support including financial inducements, and was seen as more amenable to Tehran's direction and to the adaptation of Hizbollah to post-Taif Lebanon than the other candidate, Tufayli. Nasrallah declared that Hizbollah would follow a 'dual track', simultaneously integrating into mainstream Lebanese politics while carrying on the anti-Israeli resistance.

Curiously, Subfi al-Tufayli thereafter emerged as a leader of hard-liners opposed to both Fadhallah and Nasrallah over many of these compromises, specifically participation in the Lebanese elections and possibly the *de facto* acceptance of Israel implied by the end to resistance activities after an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon (*SWB* 30 July 1991). Tufayli was kept in his position in the Majlis al-shura (leadership council) in order to prevent a split; nevertheless, in January of 1994 this factional rift took the form of open clashes in Baalbek between the followers of the two sides and there are reports that Tufayli's faction engaged in guerrilla activity against Israel independent of Nasrallah and therefore of Iranian and Syrian control.

Given the reversed ideological positions of the rivals, the struggle appeared to be more personal and regional than ideological. The Bekaa area had produced most of the younger radical clerics on Hizbollah's Majlis al-shura; Tufayli, from the Bekaa presumably had some advantage over the southerner Nasrallah in manipulating localistic ties with them; however, more moderate leaders had been brought into an expanded Majlis. Nasrallah had the backing of the Iranian government but Tufayli may have established connections with Mohtashemi (*ME* November 1994). However, Mohtashemi had no control over Iranian patronage and as Hizbollah was Lebanonized, the Mohtashemi trend declined.

Complicating factional alignments was the 1994 conflict in the Shi'a community, including Iran, over the source of spiritual emulation (*marja'iya*) which arose from Iranian leader Ali Khamenei's attempt to position himself for this role: his client, Secretary-General Nasrallah and some Bekaa leaders supported Khamenei. However, the attempt to impose Khamenei caused dissension among Hizbollahis, especially those from the south, since he lacked the students and writings needed to qualify for the role and was seen as politicizing a religious role. Perhaps indicative of a certain Lebanonization of Hizbollah was some feeling that an Iranian lacking Khomeini's universal stature should not have spiritual governance over Arabs. Part of the membership supported Hizbollah's spiritual leader Sheikh Fadhallah, who got into Iran's bad graces by nominating himself for the role in opposition to Khamenei's candidacy (*Issues* January 1994; *MEIn* January-February 1995; *MEM* 28 April 1994; *UIR* January 1995).

Political mobilization

Hizbollah was at first an umbrella movement in which membership was self-designated, made up of a multitude of factions not necessarily under a central command. In south Lebanon there was at first no clear line between Amal and Hizbollah. The success of Hizbollah, however, came in good part at the expense of Amal, a development that was by no means inevitable. On the face of it, Amal ought to have been able to more than hold its own. It was dominant in the Shi'a community in 1984 and led the resistance to Gemayel, its power manifested by Berri's ability to provoke the defection of Shi'a units of the Lebanese army. Amal had numerical superiority over Hizbollah throughout the 1980s. In the south, Amal dominated and Hizbollah began there as merely a few followers of the village mullahs (Harris and Jerome 1990).

Yet Hizbollah steadily grew at Amal's expense in spite of the uneven receptivity to radical fundamentalism among the Shi'a. It had a more dedicated, ideologically disciplined cadre than Amal, which came to be seen as ineffective or corrupt. The Shi'a sought refuge in Islam as they despaired at a return to normality in the 1980s and as secular politicians

like Nabih Berri failed, despite their government posts, to deliver solutions. Hizbollah also had a great financial advantage. Amal funding was raised domestically while Hizbollah received Iranian aid. It was reputedly receiving US\$16 million/year from Iran in the 1980s (although figures of US\$120 million were heard). This allowed it to maintain a paid fighting force while Amal relied on part-timers (*MEI* 25 July 1987; US Congress 1985, A.R.Norton Statement; Vaziri 1991:7).

The social base of Hizbollah's support was somewhat distinct from Amal. While Amal represented the middle class, Hizbollah recruited those at the bottom of the Shi'a community. Regionally, Hizbollah was far stronger in the Bekaa where the Revolutionary Guards were concentrated and where it championed the poor against the notables and developing long-neglected social services (*MEM* 28 April 1994). Amal's collapse in the south Beirut fighting of May 1988 with Hizbollah seemed to signify its relative demoralization. Once the militias were disarmed there, Hizbollah dominated this impoverished area through its welfare programmes. What is more remarkable is that Hizbollah established a respectable presence in the south where, traditionally, the population had an interest in Amal's attempt to pacify the southern border (Norton 1988a; Norton 1990:123–125). Despair caused by the constant disruption of ordinary life by the clashes with Israel and its surrogate, the South Lebanese Army (SLA) generated support for Hizbollah. Leadership in the resistance was taken by younger radical village sheikhs and their disciples; as they made Islam the chief idiom of resistance to the Israeli occupation, many youths, not necessarily fundamentalist, drifted towards Hizbollah. While Amal was disarmed under the Taif accord, Hizbollah was acknowledged to be the resistance movement in the south and escaped a similar fate. This greatly enhanced its prestige. But Hizbollah is nevertheless confined to pockets in the south, with Amal and traditional leaders dominating elsewhere due to the balance of forces enforced by the Syrians when they ended the clashes in 1989. Indicative of the balance with Amal was the composition of their joint list in the south in the 1992 Lebanese elections: four Amal and two Hizbollah candidates. In the 1996 elections the Amal-Hizbollah joint list was led by Amal.

By the 1990s Hizbollah has been transformed from an amorphous movement into a well-organized structure. A consultative Majlis al-shura made decisions implemented by an executive committee divided into specialized bureau for military affairs, social affairs, etc. (*ME* November 1994). It had an effective military wing concentrated in south Lebanon claiming some 3,000–5,000 fighters. (These numbers are probably inflated: according to one observer, a more realistic figure for full-time fighters was 600–700 (*MEI* 6 August 1993); Iranian television claimed in 1989 it had 1,500 fighters (*SWB* 9 January 1989).) Whatever their number, these fighters

were highly trained, well-equipped and motivated semi-professionals who responded rapidly to confront Israeli incursions (unlike the Palestinians, who would typically retreat). According to another report, Hizbollah had 20,000 armed supporters nationwide (*SWB* 16 November 1990).

Hizbollah ran a TV station and several radio stations. It financed a welfare system for the poor, including reduced price stores, and an educational fund and it organized reconstruction in the south after Israeli raids. The Martyrs' Foundation provided services to the families of Hizbollah martyrs and detainees. Hizbollah operated two well-equipped hospitals. Sheikh Fadhallah administered a large social service fund collected from alms under Islamic law which distributed subsidies to poor families and orphans (Holt 1994).

Where Hizbollah held near total sway, as in the southern suburbs of Beirut, pictures of its leaders and of Iranian ayatollahs were everywhere, it ran numerous construction projects, and a breed of Islamic businessmen was associated with it. But no mini-Islamic republic was imposed and unveiled women outnumbered the traditionally clad. In the Bekaa, secularism was also strong. In 1995 Hizbollah formed a partnership to reopen tourist sites there and permitted the serving of alcohol in cafes. Only in a few southern villages like Jibshit was Iranian-style Islam embraced with fervour (*MEM* 28 April 1994; *Sunday Times* 25 June 1995).

Hizbollah moved to diversify its power base as Lebanon was pacified by participating in elections to the Lebanese parliament. It campaigned intensively, benefiting from its close relations with the most underprivileged Shi'a and promising that 'We will fight poverty as ruthlessly as the Israel occupation' (*CSM* 11 September 1992). In the south, its joint anti-Israel 'liberation list' with Amal routed the traditional notable Kamal al-As'ad. Nationwide, eight Hizbollah and four Sunni fundamentalist deputies were elected to parliament and the Shi'a acquired a large presence there, especially given the decline of Sunni notables and the underrepresentation of militant Maronites who boycotted the election. Will Hizbollah be co-opted into a reconstructed Lebanese establishment by its participation in Lebanese state institutions? After the elections, it refused to enter government (especially the pro-Saudi Hariri one disliked by Iran), thereby retaining the political purity of opposition. But there were signs it was being socialized into the pluralistic system and being accustomed to the politics of compromise. The movement did not seek revenge against the Lebanese government over the killings of Hizbollahis demonstrating against the Oslo accord in September 1993. Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim al-Qasim declared that the shooting of demonstrators was aimed to provoke Hizbollah into a violent response to give the government an excuse to repress it. But the movement, he insisted, was committed to peaceful

competition in Lebanese politics. An end to the conflict in southern Lebanon would probably accelerate Hizbollah's transformation into a conventional political party.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH LEBANON

The struggle for south Lebanon began as the Lebanese central government lost control over the area during the civil war, leaving a vacuum of authority. Israel insisted on red lines beyond which Syria, after its 1976 intervention, could not pass in the south. This preserved a space where Palestinians could operate against Israel, spurring Israel's creation of the pro-Israeli SLA militia, the security zone and, after the 1982 war completed the radicalization of the Shi'ites, the rise of Hizbollah (Rabinovich 1991).

The struggle for south Lebanon since the elimination of a major Palestinian presence and Israeli's post-invasion withdrawal to its self-declared southern 'security zone' has been in some respects a proxy war of Syria and Iran with Israel. For Israel, the security zone was more than a security imperative: it also served Israel's desire to keep a hand in Lebanese politics. The Israeli presence was part of the power balance with Syria, since it threatened Syria's Western flank through ready access to the Bekaa Valley and more generally facilitated Israeli efforts to frustrate a Pax Syriana in Lebanon (Harris and Jerome 1986). This was manifest in Israel's reaction to the 1991 Syrian-Lebanese treaty: the Syrian pacification of Lebanon and strengthening of the Lebanese government had created new possibilities for the stabilization of the south; yet, the Israeli response was alarm at Syrian hegemony in Lebanon. It carried out three days of massive air raids even though there had been no recent guerrilla operations against it. These were taken as a signal to Syria that Israel would not be excluded as a player in Lebanon (*MEI* 14 June 1991).

Syria, for its part, needed proxies in an area its own troops could not enter and backed both Hizbollah and Amal in the south. This gave it dual levers of guerrilla activism and restraint, respectively, with which it could heat up or cool down the border as a way of putting pressure on Israel. A south Lebanese presence also gave pro-Syrian Palestinian factions what little credibility they had, indispensable to Syria's effort to be seen as still having a Palestinian card to play in the peace process.

Most of the actual fighting in the south was done by the Shi'a and their attitude towards Israel was ambivalent. Amal initially took the position after the main Israeli withdrawal in 1985 that the security zone should not be attacked to avoid reprisals and to show the Israelis they could withdraw from it without risk; Amal and UNIFIL could pacify the border. When Israel passed up this opportunity, Amal was drawn into a limited conflict with it:

Israel tolerated minor Amal incursions into the security zone in return for its containment of Hizbollah and the PLO. Amal reflected the views of the majority of the population at the time which believed an end to guerrilla activity would bring Israeli withdrawal (*MEI* 7 March 1986; Norton 1984a). Israel's continued presence and Amal's relative passivity fuelled the growth of Hizbollah: if the Israelis had withdrawn, Amal leaders complained, 'we would not have radicals with closed minds' (Harris and Jerome 1986).

The main practical distinction between Hizbollah and Amal was the former's greater willingness to fight Israel in the security zone—not any ambition to take the war into Israel itself. As UNIFIL spokesman Timur Goskel pointed out, Hizbollah seldom attacked Israel itself except after Israeli attacks on Shi'a villages north of the security zone (*MEI* 21 February 1992).

As Hizbollah's presence grew, the conflict over the security zone became continuous. Hizbollah fighters were highly motivated, had good intelligence and planned well. They operated in cells and had no southern bases to strike, being local village youth. In 1985/6 Hizbollah killed some 75 SLA men (*MEI* 15 September 1986). General Yossi Peled reported in March 1991 that 61 Israeli soldiers had died and 200 been wounded in the security zone since May 1985, half of those since 1989 (*MEM* 27 March 1991). In 1992 there were 170 Hizbollah attacks on the security zone and 300 in 1993. In December 1994 alone there were 70 attacks (*Ma'ariv* in *MEM* 26 January 1994; *Independent* 21 January 1995).

The effectiveness of the security zone was soon put at risk by Hizbollah, for the SLA had little ideological motivation, being recruited by a combination of material rewards (work permits in Israel) and conscription, and Israel had to pour in men and money to reinforce it; this has especially been so because of the prospect the peace process could lead to the zone's dismantling and the day of reckoning for SLA leaders. House-to-house searches inside the zone indicated Hizbollah had infiltrated the Shi'a villages inside it. Israel responded to Hizbollah attacks on the security zone with periodic sweeps, air raids and artillery bombardments north of the zone in order to break up guerrilla concentrations, deter villagers from harbouring them and send a signal to Syria. But Prime Minister Rabin acknowledged that Israel was unable to prevent Hizbollah from infiltrating villages north of the zone (*SWB* 23 April 1993), since the guerrillas were from the local populace and enjoyed local support. This was why Israeli retaliation against these villages for Hizbollah raids did not precipitate the same conflict between the guerrillas and southern people which was typical of pre-1982 PLO operations. Hizbollah also provided relief and rebuilt destroyed houses to neutralize local resentment.

Israel became increasingly frustrated and in the spring of 1992 the conflict degenerated into a major crisis. Israeli helicopters assassinated

Hizbollah leader Abbas Musawi and his family in the Bekaa, a sharp escalation in the war. Hizbollah reacted by firing rockets on northern Israel, which disrupted life for a week. Israel, in turn, destroyed two Shi'ite villages north of the security zone and its massive deployment in the security zone threatened a full-scale invasion. Syrian, Lebanese and Iranian pressure forced Hizbollah to halt rocket attacks on northern Israel, but it was probably behind attacks on Israeli embassies in Argentina and Turkey, also a departure from its normal practice. Further Hizbollah attacks on the security zone were followed by intensive Israeli assaults on Shi'ite villages and bombings of supposed Hizbollah bases in Syrian-controlled Bekaa (*MEI* 3, 17 April, 29 May 1992; *Washington Report* June, August-September 1992). The Israeli attacks had the effect of stimulating pressures in Lebanese political circles for an end to Hizbollah activities which Sheikh Fadhallah publicly rebutted (*SWB* 25 May 1992). Iran announced its opposition to any disarming of the resistance.

After a summer lull, the conflict revived. Israel and Hizbollah were engaged in a test of wills. Israel wanted to establish certain 'rules of the game' in south Lebanon under which Hizbollah would refrain from attacking Israel itself and from carrying its attacks on the security zone so far as to undermine it; Israel would be entitled to attack any target in Lebanon it suspected of involvement in guerrilla activity. During an October 1992 Hizbollah attack on an SLA post 17 guerrillas were killed but also seven Israelis and ten SLA men, according to Israeli sources (*CSM* 28 October 1992; *SWB* 3 October 1992); Hizbollah was proving too effective and Israel responded with artillery assaults on Shi'a villages and raids on Hizbollah camps (*MEI* 9 October 1992). In November a similar Israeli retaliation provoked waves of rocket attacks on northern Israeli towns; Israel concentrated troops preparatory to an invasion and it took US intervention to calm the situation. Prime Minister Rabin and Israeli General Shlomo Gazit both admitted that Hizbollah had heretofore limited its operations to the security zone and that it was Israeli retaliation that precipitated the attacks on northern Israel (*MEI* 20 November, 18 December 1992). Hizbollah was trying to establish its own rules of the game, namely, that Israel must not hit targets north of the zone if Hizbollah was to refrain from attacks on Israel.

In the summer of 1993, the deaths of five Israeli soldiers in the security zone at the hands of Hizbollah and Palestinian guerrillas, reputedly trying to undermine the peace process, helped provoke a new Israeli effort to impose its rules of the game, the so-called 'Operation Accountability'. Israel resorted to seven days of massive systematic bombing against the whole south—a 30-mile arc of devastation, in which 116 people were killed, 450 wounded, 55 towns and villages heavily damaged and a massive migration (400,000-

strong) of the population northward was set in motion; Rabin asserted that Israel's strategy was to 'cause a mass flight of residents', thereby generating pressure on the Lebanese and Syrian governments to abolish Hizbollah. Six Syrian soldiers were killed in bombings in the Bekaa and the Israeli ambassador to the peace talks, Itamar Rabinovich, warned Syria that Israeli responses to Hizbollah attacks would not necessarily be limited to Hizbollah (*Washington Report* September-October 1993). The massiveness of the Israeli attack and the targeting of Syrian forces gave some credibility to Syrian claims that Israel was trying to force concessions in the peace negotiations and to charges that it sought permanently to depopulate the south. Hizbollah, rather than being intimidated, responded by raining some 200 katushya rockets on the security zone and northern Israel where three Israelis were killed. Israeli Chief of Staff Ehud Barak admitted that, six days into the operation, Hizbollah was still firing rockets at Israel and Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah vowed that the rockets would stop only after Israel stopped its assaults on Lebanese territory.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived to broker an end to the crisis by mediating between Syria and Israel. Rabin decided to de-escalate and on 31 July 1993 Israel accepted a cease-fire brokered by the USA with Syrian cooperation. However, far from achieving a favourable change in the rules of the game, Israel, according to Israeli sources, agreed to end attacks on villages north of the security zone in return for an end to attacks on northern Israel and to firing on the security zone from the villages, without getting a Hizbollah commitment to otherwise restrain its attacks on the zone; indeed, its right to make guerrilla attacks on the security zone appears to have been legitimized and Hizbollah insisted it reserved the right to fire rockets in retaliation for attacks against Shi'a villages (*Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz* in *MEM* 16 November 1983; *MEI* 28 August 1993, 14 April 1995; *MEM* 17 November 1993, 26 January 1994).

Syria emerged from the crisis with enhanced stature. The USA praised Asad for his restraint in the face of Israeli attacks on Syrian positions. Syria pressured Hizbollah into ending the rocket attacks on Israel, forced it to withdraw its heavy weapons and rockets to the Bekaa and cut off further supplies of rockets from Iran. A token Lebanese army presence was to be deployed in the south which Israel expected would help enforce the agreement. The episode allowed Asad to show that Syrian cooperation was the key to stability in the region. On the other hand, Asad affirmed that resistance to the occupation was a legitimate right, making the point that without an Israeli withdrawal and an Arab-Israeli settlement, peace in the south would be constantly at risk (*SWB* 4 August 1993). According to Israel, Asad vetoed attempts by the Lebanese government to use the army deployment in the south to restrict Hizbollah (*SWB* 17 September 1993). Iran, for its part,

cooperated in restraining Hizbollah, for which President Rafsanjani was attacked by Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, its former Iranian patron.

On the face of it, almost all Lebanese closed ranks against the Israelis rather than blaming Hizbollah for the crisis; as such, the Israeli strategy appeared to backfire. Indeed, Hizbollah's prestige may have been boosted by its resistance and its military infrastructure survived intact, with only six guerrillas reputedly killed (*MEI* 6 August 1993). Nevertheless, Hizbollah leader Nasrallah apparently felt it necessary to send a message to the people of the south:

Don't listen to those who want to blame the resistance for [the crisis], for the cause is Israel... Unless you defend yourself... who will defend you?... the Security Council or the worn out [Arab] regimes? This is your battle and this is the war being imposed on you by the Israeli enemy and his American masters. This is your war whether you like it or not. Your land is occupied and your fate is threatened and your resources are coveted by Zionist ambitions.... We thank Syria led by Asad and Muslim Iran because they are the only countries in the world that strongly support your right to defend yourselves and to achieve liberation.

(*SWB* 9 August 1993)

Before long, there were signs that the agreement had not achieved Israeli objectives. Nine Israeli troops were killed in an ambush in the zone on 19/20 August 1993 and Israeli Chief of Staff Ehud Barak admitted that a war of attrition was still going on (*MEI* 28 August 1993; *SWB* 21 August 1993). Prime Minister Rabin seemed to acknowledge that military means had not worked and suggested that the peace process was the alternative; if Israel failed to resolve the conflict, he said, it could find Iranians in Lebanon—apparently indicative of the utility to Syria of its alliance with the Iranian bogeyman in acquiring leverage in the peace process (*SWB* 21 August 1993).

Worse for Israel, Syria seemed able to unleash Hizbollah when it believed its interests were being ignored in the peace process. According to Israeli General Mordachai Gur, over 80 attacks on the security zone and three abortive infiltrations into north Israel were recorded between September 1993 when the PLO-Israeli agreement was signed and November of that year, a sign, according to him, of Syria's displeasure at its seeming exclusion from the peace process (*MEM* 16 November 1993). The Israeli newspaper *Davar* reported there were 330 attacks in 1993 with 27 soldiers killed and 60 wounded; in January 1994 alone four were killed, seven wounded, there were 37 incidents of firing and 15 mines set off (*MEM* 7 February 1994).

In addition, Israel radio complained, Hizbollah was exploiting civilian settlements in south Lebanon as bases for activity and shelling and

called on Damascus and Beirut to uphold the understandings on this (SWB 30 December 1994). In February 1994 Hizbollah showed daring and sophistication in an attack on elite Israel Defence Force (IDF) units using anti-tank rockets to ambush armoured units, killing three Israeli soldiers and wounding four. The Israeli response included shelling of Sidon and Nabatiyeh in which schoolchildren were killed, provoking Hizbollah rocket attacks on northern Israel. Ron Ben-Ishai in *Yediot Aharanot* admitted Hizbollah had a good case that Israel had broken the rules of engagement (Ma'ariv in MEM 23 March 1994; MEM 7 February 1994).

This situation was profoundly unsatisfactory for Israel. The Israeli kidnapping of Hajj Mustafa Dirini by helicopters in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa and the dispatch of warplanes against Hizbollah bases there which killed 30 recruits indicated Hizbollah's vulnerability and embarrassed Syria by showing it could not protect Lebanon (MEM 24 May 1994). Hizbollah responded with rockets against northern Israel, Syria got Iran to restrain Hizbollah from further firing and, as before when prevented from seeking revenge in Lebanon, Hizbollah may have resorted to bombings of Jewish targets abroad—in London and Buenos Aires, where 100 were killed (MEM 6 June 1994).

By 1995, there was no sign that Hizbollah had been put on the defensive; quite the opposite. It was conducting a mobile, very effective guerrilla war while Israel was forced onto a defensive strategy of fortifications, convoys, massive firepower and air power (MEI 6 January 1995; Shahak 1995). No 'rules of engagement' seemed effectively to restrain the dynamic of escalation over the security zone. Twenty Israeli soldiers were killed there in 1994 while Israel launched 31 air strikes on Lebanese targets and killed 104 Lebanese. Israeli artillery continued to target villages north of the zone and Hizbollah periodically rocketed Israel's northern towns in retaliation. Hizbollah carried out 70 attacks on the zone in January 1995 and 80 in February 1995, a ten-year record. And, ominously for Israel, it and the SLA suffered more casualties than Hizbollah in 1995 (CSM 16 March 1995, 4 January 1996; *Independent* 21 January 1995; MEI 6 January, 21 July 1995). The Lebanese government had a solution: if Israel were to abide by UN Resolution 425 and withdraw from southern Lebanon, the *raison d'être* of the resistance would be ended, Hizbollah disarmed and the Lebanese army deployed to guarantee Israel's southern border (MEI 5 August 1994). Israel demanded, in response, that the SLA be integrated into the Lebanese army and given responsibility for security of the border (MEI 17 March 1995).

Israel's so-called 'security zone' appeared to have become a Syrian asset, allowing it to use Hizbollah to attack Israelis without attacking Israel itself with its own forces. According to Zeev Schiff writing in *Ha'aretz*, the

Syrians used it to get Israeli movement at the stalled peace negotiations, implying that otherwise Israel would enjoy no quiet or relief from attacks (*MEM* 8 February 1994). Hizbollah militancy made Syria look moderate and vital to the peace process. Moreover, Syria was using the conflict over the zone to make the point that, as the Israeli newspaper *Davar* wrote, a south Lebanon settlement which necessitated Syria disciplining Hizbollah could require Syria deploy troops in the south; in return for pacifying the Lebanese border, Syria would demand recognition by Israel of its sphere of influence in Lebanon. Indeed, the USA and even Israel seemed more ready than before to accept Lebanon as a Syrian satellite. The struggle over south Lebanon was, however, far from over (Khairallah Khairallah, *al-Hayat* in *MEM* 10 January 1994, p. 11; *MEM* 17 January, 9 February 1994).

CONCLUSIONS

The struggle over Lebanon was part of a wider power struggle over control of the Middle East which, in its starkest form, pitted the USA-Israel *combinazione* and the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Stateless, Lebanon became an arena for this contest which allowed the players to avoid the costs of direct state-to-state confrontation. Each found Lebanese clients in need of patrons to support them in the internal power struggle. While Israel and the USA exploited the Maronites' alienation from their Arab-Islamic hinterland, Syria and Iran manipulated the transstate (pan-Arab, Islamic) ties so typical of the region to mobilize Lebanese Muslim actors against the external threat.

The political mobilization of the Lebanese Shi'ites was crucial to shifting the power balance in this transstate struggle, but it was not exclusively a product of external forces, and the notion that Lebanese Shi'ism was merely a tool of an Iranian sponsored Shi'ite religious war or civilizational conflict against Israel and the West is false. The mobilization of the Shi'a movement can be best explained by concepts developed in the study of political mobilization in the Third World generally. Social mobilization, the rise of the middle class challenging a feudal order, the failure to integrate the Shi'a into the Lebanese state and a revolt by the marginalized against a Westernized order provided the domestic basis for Shi'a mobilization. Civil war, generating unremitting crisis which disrupted normal life, provided fertile ground for the rise of charismatic religio-nationalist leaders who founded movements challenging the *status quo*.

Foreign intervention and domination provided the catalyst by which an initially reformist protest movement crossed the line into a nationalist peasant war. Shi'a tradition, teaching the carrying on of Imam Hussein's

fight against oppression, even to the point of replicating his martyrdom, is perhaps conducive to such a liberation struggle. But this tradition is normally dormant and only becomes relevant when ordinary life is disrupted—as by the civil war and Israeli incursions in southern Lebanon. The transformation of Shi'a relations with Israel from an initial collaboration to unbending resistance shows that Shi'ite behaviour was a product of circumstance, interests and grievances, not some permanent cultural characteristic: only when the Israelis replaced the Palestinians as worse occupiers, did the Shi'a take to violent resistance and rejectionism spread in their ranks. Much of the energy behind Hizbollah's resistance to the Israelis in the south derived from the occupation of Lebanese territory, not some ideological crusade against Israel itself. An equitable Arab-Israeli peace which resolved the Israeli occupation of the south would remove the occasions of conflict which reinforce old grievances with new ones.

To be sure, Islamic radicalism has wider roots than resistance to Israel, including fear of Western penetration, but actual Shi'ite activism against the West cannot be adequately interpreted as a civilizational fight against Western values. Fundamentalism is but one strand of Shi'a political culture balanced by a secular and pluralistic one. It is Western or Western-tolerated Israeli intrusions into Lebanon which swung the balance towards the former at the expense of the latter. Without this there is no reason to believe Shi'a Islam and the West could not coexist with a minimum of conflict. Shi'a fundamentalists had ideological differences with the Soviet Union but the Soviets never became a target of attack because they were not damaging Lebanese or Iranian interests (*MEI* 28 September 1984; US Congress, 1985, John Esposito's Statement).

Syria and Iran had ambitions, from ideology or nationalism, to challenge Western influence in Lebanon, but this is not necessarily evidence of unremitting revisionism or ideological fanaticism: as regional middle powers they will naturally try to deflect Western penetration and preserve an autonomous sphere of influence over the region. The resort to 'terrorism'—whether guerrilla actions or manipulation of the hostage crisis—responded to specific Western threats to their interests such as support for the Iraqi war against Iran or the Israeli-imposed accord in Lebanon. Once the Western threats receded, Syria and the USA rapidly reached an accommodation in Lebanon, and Syria used its Iranian alliance gradually to resolve the hostage crisis. Thereafter, Syria exploited Hizbollah's ability to inflict pain on the Israelis in southern Lebanon, but in a strictly controlled fashion and for limited ends, namely, leverage in negotiations for an equitable and permanent peace with Israel. The Syrian-Iranian alliance was sorely tested by divergences in their goals in Lebanon, reflecting the fact that the younger

Iranian revolution retained messianic goals in the 1980s which had long been discarded by Syria. Yet conflicting ideologies were not allowed to jeopardize an alliance based on strategic national interests and once a pragmatic leadership assumed power in Iran, Syrian and Iranian goals converged.

Within the larger struggle over the Middle East, several lesser power struggles were also taking place in Lebanon. One was the drive of the Syrians for hegemony in Lebanon against the resistance of a wide spectrum of other actors. Syria repeatedly constructed coalitions used in turn against each of its main rivals—first Israel, then the PLO, Hizbollah and finally the Maronites. The use of surrogates, allies and ‘divide and rule’ tactics served limited national interests, not a revisionist attempt to overthrow international borders or absorb Lebanon.

A second struggle was that of the Shi’a for a more equitable share of power within the Lebanese political system. In the course of the struggle for Lebanon, the internal balance shifted towards the formerly deprived Shi’a community by virtue of its demography, intense mobilization and external patrons. If civil war Lebanon was a replica of the anarchic international system, the rise of the Shi’a was analogous to that of revolutionary states whose internal power mobilization upsets the balance of power between states. Typical of the extreme anarchy of the Lebanese arena was the tendency of coalitions and even movements to fragment. The Shi’a community fell into internecine warfare between moderate and radical wings, as frequently happens to revolutionary movements. In the end, however, they came together in a Syrian-led coalition which finally ended the civil war.

Lebanon will not soon be the same now that the arousal, radicalization and internationalization of the Shi’a has been incorporated in a permanent organization, Hizbollah. Yet, as Hizbollah has come to acquire bureaucratic and social interests in Lebanon which would be put at risk by reckless actions, it has moderated its radicalism in favour of more realistic and limited goals. It seems prepared to be part of a pluralistic Lebanon and to disengage from the struggle with Israel, if the latter leaves Lebanon. This is fully consistent with the tendency, noted by Weber, for charismatic-ideological movements to accommodate themselves, over time, to everyday normal life.

The Syrian-Iranian alliance still aspires to keep Lebanon in its sphere of influence, perhaps part of a semi-autonomous regional economic bloc capable of containing Western and Israeli penetration. The reconstructed Lebanese state is, by virtue of the incorporation of the Shi’a into the power structure, certain to be more tightly tied to its Arab and Islamic hinterland than when it was dominated by a Maronite minority alienated from

indigenous culture and tightly integrated into the world capitalist system; Hizbollah will remain a key ally of Damascus and Tehran in the struggle to keep it that way. Lebanon may be a test case of the ability of regional middle powers to dilute the consequences of the collapse of bipolarity and the globalization of the Western-dominated capitalist order.

7 Syria, Iran and the Arab-Israeli peace process

Israel has long been perceived in Damascus and Tehran as a Western implant, the primary threat to the autonomy and integrity of the region. Nevertheless, bowing to the realities of the power balance, Syria under Asad pursued an end to the conflict with it on terms which would merely minimize Israeli hegemony. Iran under President Rafsanjani, at Syrian urging, accepted, in practice, the reality of a settlement. This is hardly compatible with claims that these regimes were driven by unrelenting irredentism or that domestic stability depended on keeping the Arab-Israeli conflict brewing.

SYRIAN STRATEGY IN THE PEACE TALKS

Asad has accepted a land-for-peace settlement of the conflict with Israel since the 1970s; however, throughout the 1980s, believing that the strategic imbalance in Israel's favour precluded an honourable settlement, he opposed negotiations until Israel committed itself to full withdrawal, and he sought to obstruct attempts to bypass Syria and broker Israeli deals with Jordan or the Palestinians.

That Asad joined the US-sponsored peace process after the Gulf war was a measure of a radical change in his strategy and circumstances. The power balance was even more unfavourable than in the 1980s but Asad's options had narrowed: lacking Soviet support, Syria could not credibly threaten a war in the absence of an acceptable settlement. On the other hand, Asad was determined to protect his investment in entering the anti-Iraq coalition and to reap what benefits he could while his standing with the USA was still relatively high and Israel's utility for protecting US Middle East interests seemed to be relatively low. The Gulf crisis had also allowed Syria to re-situate itself at the Arab centre and weakened Jordan and the PLO, leading Asad to think he had less to fear from their pursuit of separate deals with Israel which had obsessed him in the 1980s when Syria was isolated.

Asad entered the peace process, not with the aim of abandoning his goal of an 'honourable' peace achieving full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines but rather of adapting his strategy to new conditions. He believed Syria retained bargaining assets: if Syria's interests were ignored there could be no real peace, for Asad still possessed some ability militarily and politically to frustrate a peace settlement that excluded him. Asad also believed that he now enjoyed a possibly unique opportunity to reach his goals through diplomacy. The apparent strengthening of the UN in the Gulf war and the coincidence of this development with America's interest in a 'New World Order' favoured Syria since UN Resolutions required Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. While, in military terms, strategic parity with Israel had receded, in a more broadly defined balance including 'international legitimacy' and the US interest in a peace settlement to contain the fallout of the anti-Iraq war, Syria might not be at such a disadvantage (Armanazi 1993:117). Vice-President Khaddam justified the decision to join the peace process to assembled party leaders on the grounds of the end to bipolarity, the international momentum after the Gulf war to settle the conflict and the US commitment to a comprehensive solution based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 (*SWB* 23 July 1991).

Asad's initial strategy was to explore the chances for an acceptable agreement while retaining the option to refuse any deal that entailed less than full Israeli withdrawal. The latter entailed the risk of Syria being isolated and bypassed. Alternatively, he could alter his goals depending on what he could realistically expect to achieve and what the Syrian public would accept.

Syrian goals in the peace process

Procedures

Asad had long insisted, as conditions for a peace conference, on a united Arab delegation so Israel could not divide the Arabs, on UN sponsorship which would make UN 242/338 the basis of a settlement and mobilize global pressures on Israel, on a Soviet-American role in breaking deadlocks and on prior Israeli commitment to the principle of full withdrawal. The first effect of the power imbalance which Syria now faced was the procedural concessions that Asad made: Syria accepted direct unconditional bilateral negotiations without an Israeli commitment that UN Resolutions required full withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Asad did extract a US letter of assurance that UN Resolutions 242 and 338 were the legal basis of the peace process (*MEM* 15 October 1991). Syria thereafter insisted that all negotiations remain inside the Madrid framework (rejecting secret informal negotiations) for fear Israel would lure other Arab

parties into secret deals and because agreements reached outside the conference could forfeit the benefit to the Arabs of the legal principle on which it was based. Asad consoled himself that the conference was, at least nominally, international, given Soviet, American, European and UN participation in the opening session at Madrid and because the UN was not wholly excluded:

As for UN role, it took me some time before I was convinced that the group of elements together constituted an adequate UN role—the observers and the Resolutions through which the UN exists [in the process], and that any agreements would be ratified by the Security Council. Also calling the UN an observer just means it has no vote and this is not a voting conference; an observer takes part in discussions and activities.

(*SWB* 19 July 1991)

Moreover, as the Soviet Union's influence declined so did the prospects a true international conference would bring pressure on Israel; increasingly, only American pressure seemed likely to count (Diab 1994:83). Asad therefore attempted to get prior US commitments to require a full Israeli withdrawal, but neither US President George Bush nor Secretary of State James Baker explicitly promised a return of the Golan, only that the USA would abide by its commitments on UN Resolutions made over several presidencies (*SWB* 31 July 1991). The USA, Bush affirmed, did not recognize Israel's annexation of the Golan. Invitations to the conference specified the UN Resolutions as the basis of a settlement. All parties, Baker said, had their interpretation of the Resolutions and the negotiations would define what was required of each; he rejected Syria's request that the Security Council issue a definitive interpretation of the Resolutions (*MEM* 16 October 1991; *SWB* 20 July 1991).

Asad still had some chance of achieving a full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines if he could orchestrate a common Arab front and demonstrate that Israel could not have peace without it. He therefore aimed to make Syria central to settling the terms and approving the final comprehensive arrangement on all fronts, not just the Golan, and to this end hosted several Arab coordination meetings in Damascus.

However, a common Arab position proved impossible to coordinate. It was, in part, frustrated because the Madrid formula specified bilateral negotiations between Israel and the separate parties and because the built-in discrepancy between the Syria-Israel 'track' aiming at a final status agreement and the Palestinian one aimed at an interim regime obstructed parallel advances on the two tracks. Damascus hoped it could impose coordination because the weakening of the PLO and Jordan in the Gulf crisis seemed to make them dependent on Syria for diplomatic leverage on

their tracks. It was Israel, however, that proved able to take advantage of their weaknesses to break the Arab front, specifically Arafat's readiness to accept a partial agreement that would restore his political position.

Also crucial to Syria's leverage was its ability to veto any normalization of relations between Israel and the wider Arab world in the absence of a comprehensive peace. However, the so-called 'multilateral' talks which the USA promoted as confidence-building measures and which brought Israel and a wide range of Arab actors into discussion of normalization, undermined Syria's bid to impose a common Arab position.

Syria refused to attend the multilateral negotiations on the grounds that issues involving normalization of relations (such as water resources and economic cooperation) had to follow, not precede, Israeli territorial withdrawal; otherwise, they served the Israeli attempt to achieve normalization without withdrawal. Asad declared that 'If progress [on territorial issues] were made, helpful confidence building proposals could be adopted. That would be quite different from putting them at the outset of the conference' (Asad interview, *MEM* 28 October 1991, p. 22; *MEI* 25 October 1991; *SWB* 18 October 1991).

However, the other Arab parties, under US pressure, defied Asad and participated in the multilateral talks. While the Gulf Arab states assured Syria they would sign no regional agreements with Israel or end the Arab economic boycott until all Arab-Israeli problems were solved in the bilateral negotiations, the GCC states in fact broke their promises by lifting the secondary boycott of Israel without an Arab League Resolution (*MEM* 13, 14 November 1991). Despite Syrian objections, they and other Arab states participated in the Casablanca conference bringing Israel and the Arab states together to discuss economic cooperation.

All this would confine Syria's role, in practical terms, to bilateral negotiations with Israel over the Golan. In accepting Israel's procedural terms, Asad was manoeuvred into a position where he could no longer play the Palestinian card in bargaining over Syria's interests and, having no leverage over outcomes on the Palestinian front, would have to accept or reject a separate Syrian-Israeli peace. Despite his rapid loss of control over the peace process, he had invested too much political capital in joining it to withdraw and the risks of such a step would have been significant: Israel could feel free to attack a totally isolated Syria and Damascus could be left out of a settlement (Yorke 1991:16).

Return of the Golan Heights

Syria consistently made a peace settlement contingent on return of the full Golan. Bearing much of the responsibility for its loss, which occurred

while he was Defence Minister, Asad could not very well settle for less. Settling for half the Golan, as the Israelis proposed, was unattractive since its main values were symbolic (the need to recover the lost honour of 1967 and deny Israel the fruits of conquest) and security-related—to remove the Israeli threat to Damascus. Only the return of the full territory would achieve these ends. The some 100,000 Syrians expelled from the area (now about 400,000 from natural increase) were a permanent constituency on behalf of full recovery (Zunes 1993:63). Asad continued, even after the peace negotiations began, to restrict his own bargaining flexibility by reaffirmation that ‘Syria will not abandon an inch of the Golan and...a compromise on the territories is out of the question’ (*SWB* 29 September 1993). ‘Every Syrian believes’, he proclaimed to a Western reporter, ‘that whosoever yields a part of his land is a traitor and the fate of traitors is well known’ (Asad interview, *Time* 30 November 1992, p. 49; *SWB* 7 December 1992).

After entering the peace process, however, Syria showed increased flexibility over the *terms* by which the Golan would be returned. While full Syrian sovereignty on the Golan had to be restored, demilitarized zones and peacekeeping forces there were acceptable to Syria. There could be a phased settlement, within a ‘reasonable time frame’, as long as Syrian sovereignty of the Golan and its ultimate return, was guaranteed in advance.

Palestinian rights

Syria had long insisted that peace had to be ‘comprehensive’ and thus achieve Palestinian rights. These rights were traditionally interpreted as requiring total Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, a Palestinian state on this land, and the right of refugees from Israel proper to ‘repatriation or compensation’. Asad long insisted Syria would not make a separate settlement: ‘Had Syria thought of its own interest only...it would have achieved a unilateral solution...But it did not and will not do this. The Golan was originally occupied in a battle waged for Palestine’ (*FBIS* 8 May 1990, p. 31). In entering the Madrid negotiations, Asad and the PLO agreed that neither would sign a separate peace settlement with Israel. Asad conceded that ‘some aspects of the conflict might be settled before others’, but they had to be part of a comprehensive peace (Asad interview, *Time* 30 November 1992, p. 49; *Washington Report* July-August 1993). While Syria usually held that the Palestinians themselves would decide what sort of solution satisfied their national rights, Asad permitted Palestinian rejectionist factions in Damascus to insist the PLO negotiate for full Israeli withdrawal, not mere autonomy. In 1993, Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara’a affirmed that Syria would not sign a treaty with Israel, even if the

whole Golan were returned, until the Palestinians accepted an interim self-government agreement. Asad's firmness, in talks with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, that Syria would not conclude a separate settlement apparently surprised Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and convinced him that the 'Syria first' option he had been toying with, would not fly (*CSM* 19 March 1993; *MEI* 5 March 1993). Ironically, this led Rabin to pursue the Oslo agreement with the Palestinians.

The Palestinian-Israeli agreement reached at Oslo in August 1993 precipitated a major alteration in Syrian goals. Asad conceded the Palestinians had the right to adopt any agreement they considered beneficial to themselves. However, Syria and its Palestinian allies questioned whether, in fact, Arafat represented the Palestinian people; pro-Syrian Palestinian groups insisted the agreement was a personal decision, unratified by the Palestine National Council (PNC), the main source of institutional legitimacy in the PLO (*SWB* 13 September 1993). Asad explained that, 'If Syria wanted to obstruct the agreement it would have foiled it, and if it becomes clear to us that this agreement will create major damage, we will do so'. But he did not believe it constituted a threat and was just a step along a long road (*SWB* 21, 24 September 1993). Asad told the Western media: 'The Arabs are one people. Had I signed the type of agreement signed by Arafat, I would have faced major and numerous problems...because Syrian citizens would believe that...I had turned my back on another Arab people'. He would not hinder the Israel-PLO deal, but neither would he suppress opposition to it (*MEM* 4 October 1993, pp. 10–11). Damascus radio declared that Palestine was an Arab cause and nobody could decide it alone (*SWB* 23 September 1993).

Nevertheless, Oslo posed profound dilemmas for Syrian leaders. Although they did not exclude the possibility that it might evolve into an acceptable solution to the Palestinian issue, they were sceptical. According to Bilal al-Hassan writing in *Asharq al-Awsat*, Syria believed the agreement addressed none of the substantive issues: 'there was no end to the occupation...no return for the refugees, no Arab right to Jerusalem' (*MEM* 4 October 1993). If the agreement did not end in a Palestinian state Palestine would be turned into an Israeli satellite and, as Jordan was drawn in as well, the agreement threatened virtually to establish a Greater Israel by diplomatic and economic means. If Syria became part of such a false peace settlement in which its relations with Israel were normalized while the repression of Palestinian rights on the West Bank continued, it could very plausibly be viewed as a Syrian defeat and Ba'thist betrayal of the principles for which the Ba'th regime imposed sacrifices on the Syrian people for 30 years. Syrian leaders were also conscious of the sizeable Palestinian refugee population in Syria: what is the solution, Khaddam asked, for the 4 million

Palestinians outside the territories? Giving them citizenship of the host country means the consequences of a problem created by Israel will be borne by others (*MEM* 16 November 1993). Asad told President Clinton in January 1994: 'To me, there is no difference between the Golan, south Lebanon and the occupied parts of Palestine or Jordan... It is all one Arab land as far as I am concerned'. There had been three unilateral experiments, he observed, that did not end the conflict—Camp David, Lebanon's 17 May accord, and now the Gaza-Jericho one. 'These are enough to indicate that unilateral solutions, even if they multiply, do not make peace' (Talal Salman in *al-Safir*, *MEM* 18 January 1994).

Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, there was little Syria could do about the Palestinian issue. It had been excluded from negotiations over Palestine by the PLO as much as by Israel. Syria could only negotiate for the Golan, a high official conceded, not on behalf of Arafat or King Hussein (interview, Syrian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Damascus, July 1994). If the PLO was accepting less than full withdrawal on the West Bank, could Syria credibly insist on more for the Palestinians? Because the PLO had, in effect, made a separate deal with Israel, Asad could separately pursue his own deal on the Golan less vulnerable than heretofore to the charge he was abandoning Palestine. Although Syria's strategy remained purposely ambiguous, its initial fall-back position appeared to be that Israel could have a peace treaty in exchange for withdrawal from the Golan, but Syrian-Israeli *normalization* would require the Oslo accord to develop into a credible solution for the Palestinians and be phased with progress on the West Bank and Gaza (Diab 1993). Alternatively, if this proved unrealistic, the regime could accept a settlement but insist that the ideological conflict with Israel would continue until an adequate resolution of the Palestine issue was reached (Diab 1994:81). The regime seemed in no hurry to commit itself; according to the Syrian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Syria would wait and see if Palestinian rights could be achieved under Oslo (interview, Damascus, July 1994). Nevertheless, as the Palestinian and Jordanian 'tracks' advanced, however fitfully, Asad could not readily afford to be left behind and by 1994 he appeared ready to cut his losses and concentrate on the return of the Golan. The clearest sign of this was Asad's lament on Syrian television: 'What can we do', he asked, 'since the others have left us and gone forward?' (*ME* September 1995, p. 8).

Increasingly, as Syria was excluded from the Palestinian issue and Jordan pursued its separate course, the importance of Syria's position in Lebanon increased and an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, leaving Lebanon within Syria's sphere of influence, became, from Syria's point of view, an integral part of any Syrian-Israeli settlement.

The nature of peace

A peace settlement, in the earliest Syrian conception, would have meant only the end of belligerency and would have entailed neither diplomatic nor trade relations. This fell far short of the 'full peace' demanded by Israel. Asad edged closer to the Israeli demand for a full peace in the 1970s: diplomatic and other relations could come about, he declared, but only once the necessary 'psychological composure' had been established.

On entering the Madrid peace process, Syria explicitly offered Israel a peace treaty but its negotiator, Muwaffak al-Allaf, insisted that Syria was not, under UN 242/338, legally obliged to accept the open borders and free trade Israel was demanding; these could only be the *result*, not the *preconditions* of peace (*SWB* 18 December 1992; *Washington Report* November 1992). Normalization had to follow, not precede, full withdrawal. Normalization could not be imposed, as the case of Egyptian-Israeli relations ought to have shown. But, as confidence between the states grew and if Israel conceded Palestinian rights, such as repatriation or compensation, Syria would reciprocate with full normalization. Al-Shara'a declared that Syria was ready, once peace was established, to do 'everything that was usually done in international practice' to normalize relations; but this practice did not require a 'warm' peace (*MEI* 18 March 1994). Syria wanted normalization stretched out and wanted to keep its own relations with Israel minimal—confined to a 'cold peace'. Indeed, Vice-President Khaddam told an Islamic delegation there could be no *sulh* (reconciliation) with the Jews because of their limitless ambitions.

For Syria, thus, normalization meant a selective approach to relations while for Israel it meant total openness to Israel. Israel insisted on opening Syria to its diplomats, goods and tourists. A cold peace, it claimed, could easily revert to war and Israel would not dismantle settlements unless it was sure peace was real. Moreover, Israel expected that peace would permit its incorporation into the Middle East. Syria's strategic goal, by contrast, was to contain Israel within its pre-1967 lines and it therefore sought to resist Israeli economic and cultural penetration of the Arab world; it feared that the sort of peace shaping up would absorb Jordan, the Palestinians and Lebanon into Israel's sphere of influence at the expense of Syria's regional ambitions (Zunes 1993:64). In January 1994 Vice-President Khaddam declared that the idea of a Middle East market was aimed at giving Israel control of Arab resources and finishing the Arabs off as a force. 'We refuse to have Israel as part of the Arab world' (*MEM* 5 January 1994, pp. 9–10). The Arab world was a distinct nation homogeneous in culture, values and interest, and Israel could no more be assimilated into it than Morocco or Turkey were being accepted into the European Union (*MEM* 17 November

1993, pp. 11–16). In Syria's view, 'The Arabs' very existence and civilization is threatened by the illusion of a merger with the "Middle East" designed to drive the last nail into the coffin of Arab nationalism and Arab unity' (*MEM* 9 December 1993, p. 15). On the other hand, there had long been a view among Syrians that Israel could be absorbed into the Arab world by being 'Levantized'. In this view, normalization could undermine Israel's Zionist exclusivism. Since Syria cannot have the Golan without some normalization, this justification for it may well be dusted off and presented to the public.

The negotiation process

Asad approached the peace process, as former Israeli Foreign Minister Peres put it, 'as one conducts a military campaign—slowly, patiently, directed by strategic and tactical considerations' (*SWB* 3 August 1993). The regime sent a similar message to its constituency: the peace process, Ba'th party assistant secretary Abdullah al-Ahmar told the party ranks, 'is an extension in new form of the liberation battle, appropriate to the new circumstances in the world, including the American interest in settling the conflict after the Gulf war' (*MEM* 16 November 1993). Indeed, Syria and Israel initially shared a conception of the peace process which was similar to warfare: a zero-sum game in which each tried to gain leverage over the other. However, the negotiations brought the Syrian and Israeli positions closer together and by the mid-1990s both had begun to talk of the peace negotiations as a conflict-resolution process in which both stood to gain.

Little progress was made until the election of the Rabin government when, at the sixth round of the negotiations, Israel acknowledged that a settlement had to be comprehensive and that UN Resolution 242 applied to the Golan, although Rabin qualified this, saying that 'Israel's interpretation of UN 242 does not necessarily follow the precedent of Sinai'—i.e., full withdrawal (*MEI* 11 September 1992, pp. 3–4). Against Syria's attempts to get Israel to commit to full withdrawal, the Israelis insisted it would be 'on', not 'from' the Golan. UN 242 merely called for 'withdrawal from territories' (not all the territories) to 'secure and recognized borders' and Israeli security required adjustments of the borders. Rabin's initial position (as laid out by Israel's chief negotiator Itamar Rabinovich in October 1992) was that even a full peace would not merit a full Israeli withdrawal (*SWB* 25 October 1992). Israel would not detail the extent of withdrawal until Syria committed itself to a 'full peace' entailing open borders and diplomatic relations. Moreover, Israel insisted that Syria abandon its insistence that a Syrian-Israeli agreement be contingent on settlement of the Palestinian issue.

In the sixth round, Syria explicitly offered a peace treaty in return for evacuation, dropped its insistence that evacuation precede a treaty, and

acknowledged that Israel's security concerns had to be addressed (*CSM* 4 September 1992; *MEI* 25 September 1992; *Washington Report* October 1992). But Syria insisted no partial withdrawal was acceptable; it argued that UN Resolution 242, in affirming the 'inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force', clearly required full Israeli withdrawal. Moreover, Israeli commitment to full withdrawal had to come before Syria would commit itself to detailing the nature of peace. Asad evidently feared that laying out the shape of a peace would give other Arab states the impression that peace was inevitable and they could therefore begin to normalize relations with Israel, destroying what leverage Syria retained from the perception it could veto this normalization. Moreover, since normalization would be difficult to sell at home against public hostility to Israel, Asad did not wish to commit himself to paying this cost without the certainty he would get full withdrawal.

Indicative of the seriousness with which Syria took the negotiations is the fact that Damascus took the lead in pressing the Palestinians, Jordanians and Lebanese to resume the peace talks after they were interrupted by Israel's December 1992 expulsion of the HAMAS Palestinians to south Lebanon. Nor did Syria let the summer 1993 crisis in south Lebanon abort the peace process; the crisis actually seemed to advance it since Syria's cooperation in its resolution led Israel to view Asad, in Foreign Minister Peres' words, as a serious negotiating partner who wanted peace, and to see Syria as a bulwark against the spread of 'Khomeinism', which Rabin had identified as Israel's main security threat (*IEI* April 1993). Asad, inching closer to Israel's demands, told Secretary of State Warren Christopher in July 1993 that once Israel committed itself to full withdrawal, Syria would join the multilateral talks and discuss the details of the peace, including lifting of the Arab boycott, diplomatic relations and open borders (*ME* July 1993; *MEI* 14 April 1993). Once Israel fully withdrew, Shara'a declared, there would be no bar to 'full relations' (*Washington Report* July-August 1993). According to Israeli chief delegate Itamar Rabinovich, 'Syria's concept of peace seems more far reaching than the Israeli government had appreciated' (*ME* July 1993, pp. 15-18). Yet Peres still declared that: 'Asad's idea of peace is presently technical—without diplomatic relations or open borders. That is not peace. For that a much lower price than Asad expects should be paid' (*SWB* 4 August 1993). In October 1993, Asad told the Western media: 'We know that peace has its requirements. We do not expect to get our rights... without giving the others also what they believe are their rights'. Christopher brought to Israel the message that 'Asad understands he will not be signing a [mere] piece of paper... which will merely create a state of non-belligerency' (*MEM* 4 October 1993, pp. 10-11).

By this time there was, as Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin observed, considerable overlap in the positions of the two sides. Syrian negotiator Allaf had put forth a formula under which the more land Israel conceded the more peace it could have and a total peace could be had for total withdrawal. Israel had said the depth of withdrawal would correspond to the scope of peace. But each side wanted the other to publicly commit itself first. Rabinovich explained that Rabin's refusal to publicly offer full withdrawal only meant Israel would not pledge it in advance (*SWB* 17 June 1993). Syria insisted any explicit announcement of its readiness for full peace was conditional on a clear timetable for full withdrawal.

The September 1993 PLO-Israeli agreement stalled further progress in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, and appeared to substantially undermine Asad's bargaining power. It may, indeed, have aborted an agreement: Rabin, according to some Israelis, had become resigned to full withdrawal on the Golan, but froze this when he saw he could get a deal with the PLO without conceding territory (*Ha'aretz* in *MEM* 10 January 1994). Rabin declared that it was preferable to have a partial withdrawal on the Palestinian front than a full one from the Golan and that the Oslo accord gave Israel 'freedom of manoeuvrability' towards Syria. And Israel had to digest the PLO deal before moving on the Syrian track.

The contrast between Egyptian President Husni Mubarak's view of the Oslo accord and Syria's is suggestive. For Mubarak, progress achieved on one front made it easier on another since it 'shrinks the circle of conflict and bolsters confidence'. For Syria, by contrast, concessions to Israel only whet its appetite for, according to *al-Thawra*, the world gives no weight to the weak, the defeated, and those who give up their rights and interests. *Al-Thawra* mocked Arafat for begging for Rabin's handshake, an act that would have 'lasting effects on the Arab psyche' (*SWB* 17 September 1993). Israel's strength stemmed from the weakness of the Arabs and the agreement had weakened them for, Asad declared, 'no matter what fight each individual Arab [party] puts up, it will be weaker...than the collective Arab group' (*SWB* 24 September 1993). Trying to refute the notion that the PLO deal had settled the Arab-Israeli conflict, Asad reversed his earlier view that Palestine was the heart of the matter: 'The occupation of Palestine was just a bridge to the occupation of Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian land' (*MEM* 4 October 1993, pp. 10–11).

The agreement threatened Syrian leverage by precipitating a rush towards normalization by the Arab states. Syria called for the Arabs to stand firm on the economic boycott against Israeli 'penetration of the Arab market and soul' (*SWB* 27 September 1993). Syrian radio warned that any Arab state which normalized relations with Israel would be serving Israel's attempt to impose hegemony on the Arabs. The Arab boycott was an important weapon

in restoring Arab rights and territories (*SWB* 11 November 1993). 'What interest does any Arab state have in one of its officials meeting with an Israeli official when Syria is still in a state of war with Israel?' thundered Khaddam (*MEM* 5 January 1994, pp. 9–10). *Tishrin* warned the Gulf Arabs that funding the Israeli-PLO deal would be 'bankrolling Israeli occupation'. The biggest threat to peace was the illusion that the agreement had achieved peace (*MEM* 5 October 1993).

The analysis by Gamal Matar in *al-Hayat* accorded with Syrian thinking. Israel was stonewalling on the Syrian front to get access to the Arab market before Syria could stop it. Syrian-Palestinian hostility was being used by Israel to maintain Palestinian dependency, for if Syria and the PLO were to coordinate their diplomacy, it would strengthen the Palestinians' hand and allow the two to insist on full Israeli withdrawal in return for Israeli access to Arab markets. Israel aspired to use its tame Palestinian entity to become the nucleus of a new Middle East order excluding Syria. *Tishrin* wrote that Arafat thought in signing the Oslo accord he was depriving Syria of any role in the Palestine issue and that he would gain strength in the occupied territories to shore up his sagging personal power. But he had relieved Israel of international pressure for withdrawal from the territories and given it a bridge by which it could 'cross to the depth of the Arab nation'. The Palestine cause has been transformed from a matter of national rights to one of administration over 300 square kilometres (*MEM* 23 November 1993).

Khaddam's January 1994 address to Arab journalists summarized Syria's continuing view of the peace process as a struggle with Israel over hegemony in the Arab world. The Arabs faced Zionist and foreign designs at a time when the international circumstances lacked balance, objectivity and law. The Arabs were fragmented while the Zionists remained committed to their ideology and ambition to be the dominant power in the area. All pan-Arab values had vanished, replaced by state self-interest, due in good part to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. But Syria, owing to its status as a confrontation state, realized the importance of restoring Arab solidarity. There was a military imbalance but the days were gone when Israel could carry out unhindered military operations demoralizing the Arabs (*SWB* 6 January 1994).

Nevertheless, in practice, Syria had been weakened diplomatically; Israel, sensing it had acquired new leverage from the Oslo accord, pressed for secret negotiations and a summit with Asad: Peres announced that to get an Israeli withdrawal comparable to that in the Sinai Asad would have to deal with Israel as Sadat had done (*SWB* 30 September 1993). Syria believed a summit would facilitate Israel's campaign for normalization without withdrawal. A summit would also tend irrevocably to commit

Asad to the peace process, increase his investment in it and the likelihood of his making concessions to ensure its success. Asad insisted that 'peace requires long and arduous discussions that cannot be carried out at summits. Peace may bring such meetings but such meetings cannot bring peace' (Asad interview, *Time* 30 November 1992, p. 49). Although he allowed unofficial discussions between the countries' Washington ambassadors, Asad's strategy was to hold out for US intervention in bridging the gap with Israel: not only could that bring pressure on Israel, but it was crucial, given the power imbalance in Israel's favour, to have the US intimately involved in guaranteeing any agreement if Syria was to have confidence in it. Israel, for its part, discouraged the USA from playing an active mediating role precisely in order to force Asad to deal with it directly on its terms.

Syria looked to the January 1994 Clinton-Asad meeting to restart the Syrian-Israeli track. At this meeting, Asad agreed to 'establish normal relations in the area' but refused to publicly commit himself explicitly on what this entailed: 'We will respond to the requisites of peace. But this... will hinge on the discussions at the negotiation table, not here at this press conference'. But Clinton announced he had a firm commitment from Asad to normalize relations with Israel—meaning open borders, free trade and diplomatic relations. Rabin, however, dismissed the US view that the Clinton meeting had achieved a breakthrough and interpreted Asad to have made normalization conditional on a comprehensive settlement (*Ha'aretz* in *MEM* 21 January 94). Rabin acknowledged the Syrians had conceded the Israeli demand that a peace treaty would 'stand on its own feet' in the sense that its durability would not be contingent on Israel's future relations with other Arab parties. Asad still insisted this treaty would have to be part of a comprehensive settlement (*MEM* 26 January 1994, p. 4). However, bowing to the *Oslo fait accompli*, he conceded that peace would be reached 'through a set of bilateral agreements between each of the Arab partners and Israel', rather than one in which the Arab parties would, as a group, sign a peace treaty with Israel (Neria 1995:8–12). Although Bill Clinton's November 1994 visit to Damascus and Foreign Secretary Warren Christopher's repeated trips demonstrated the US interest in a Syrian-Israeli peace, Syria was disappointed with the US role; deferring to Israel, the USA not only put no pressure on Israel to be more flexible, but refrained from offering any of its own solutions to the deadlock between the parties.

Israel continued to win incremental concessions from the Arabs on the normalization front, including a GCC lifting of the secondary boycott against Israel, although they warned it that full normalization would depend on a settlement with Syria (*MEI* 7 October 1994; *MEM* 27 January 1994). Jordan, fearing exclusion from the economic arrangements being made in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement, signed a peace treaty with

Israel in October 1994. This, in showing Syria again impotent to stop separate agreements with Israel, was a major blow to Syria's leverage. Syria's response, muted by comparison to its active obstruction of less-threatening Jordanian initiatives in the 1980s, was indicative of the unfavourable balance of power and the realization that a strong reaction would merely end Syria's chance of its own deal on the Golan. Asad declared that Syria would continue the peace talks 'until there is no possibility of a just peace' (*MEM* 10 March 1994).

As if Israel was deploying both carrots and sticks in dealing with Syria, the Israeli press in 1994 was full of claims that Rabin had accepted the principle of full withdrawal from the Golan. IDF and Foreign Ministry papers were drafted on withdrawal, while leaving the extent ambiguous (*MEM* 18 April 1994, p. 2). Israel, according to Zeev Schiff, realized stable peace was inconceivable without Syria: Lebanon could not be solved, Iran would find opportunities to make trouble, there would be no arms control and a level of military threat and insecurity would continue. Rabin's interest in the Syrian track revived as negotiations with the PLO became bogged down and Israeli-Palestinian violence tarnished the Oslo accord. Rabin publicly stated that peace was more important than keeping certain settlements on the Golan, but also promised the Israelis that he would fight to avoid the Sinai model—full withdrawal for full peace (*MEM* 25 April 1994; *The Times* 22 April 1994). He committed himself to submitting any treaty with Syria to a public referendum; arguably, this move was to force Asad to appeal directly to Syrian public opinion if he wanted Israeli withdrawal, but it also left Syria with the risk that it might make difficult concessions to get an agreement with the Israeli government only to have it rejected by the Israeli public (*Yediot Aharonot* in *MEM* 23 February 1994). Syria feared that Israel's hints of full withdrawal were merely tactical: e.g., to prevent the Syrians from undermining the Oslo accord and to pressure Arafat with the prospect of being bypassed on the Syrian track. Asad summarized the situation as he saw it: 'We said full peace but Rabin hasn't said full withdrawal' (*SANA* in *MEM* 10 March 1994, p. 11).

The meaning of full Israeli withdrawal also remained ambiguous and an issue of potential dispute. Israel insisted the international boundary meant the pre-1948 borders which placed Lake Tiberias entirely in its territory. Syria argued that it meant an Israeli return to the borders before 1967 which, as a result of the Syrian army's 1948 seizure of certain small salients on the Lake's northern shore which later were made demilitarized zones, left Syria some access to the Lake. In their more optimistic moments, the Syrians hoped Rabin's rejection of withdrawal on the Golan to the 1967 lines merely meant Israel would not return these small 'disputed areas' and indeed Foreign Minister Peres hinted that this was the main outstanding territorial issue

(MEI 23 September 1994, p. 3). This issue was linked to that of water resources. Syria, according to Zeev Schiff, could not be allowed to return to the northern shore of Lake Tiberias since this is Israel's water reserve. The Golan itself is rich in scarce water resources and the headwaters of the Jordan river, which Israel uses extensively, rise in the Golan. Israel insisted that agreement on the sharing of these resources would be required, which Syria conceded (Dijani 1993:3; Moore 1994:76–77).

The Americans reputedly assured Asad that Israel was, in private, committed to full withdrawal. They convinced both sides to leapfrog a formal agreement on the core issues and begin negotiations in 1994 on secondary matters which would have to be resolved in any actual withdrawal. Timing was a major stumbling block. Israel proposed a three-stage Golan withdrawal over five years: after a first minor pull-back (from certain Druze villages), Syria would have to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and satisfy Israel that it was implementing normalization before further withdrawals. In the Egyptian case, normalization preceded withdrawal, Rabin declared, and it must also with Syria. Syria wanted full withdrawal within a 'reasonable' time frame of about a year. Pointing to Israel's reluctance to fulfil the Oslo accord, Asad rejected any agreement which left the outcome to Israel's discretion and refused normalization prior to withdrawal (Dijani 1993:3; *Ha'aretz* in MEM 18 April 1994; MEM 1 June 1994; *The Times* 16 May 1994). According to one observer, in mid-1995 a compromise was almost reached whereby Israeli withdrawal and normalization would both be phased over a two-year period (Ben-Meir 1995:13–18).

There were also disagreements over security issues. Israel's initial position was that its security required keeping part of the Golan. As Israel inched closer to the Syrian demand for full withdrawal from the Golan, it began to insist on substitutes for territory. Meetings between the chiefs of staff of Israel and Syria in 1994 and 1995 attempted to address these issues. Israel's 'maximum position' included dismantling of Syrian chemical weapons and a radical reduction in the Syrian standing army which was much larger than Israel's; however, given Israel's nuclear monopoly and in the absence of an efficient way to rapidly mobilize Syrian reserves, these demands would demolish Syria's deterrent posture. Israeli demands for downsizing (perhaps halving) the Syrian army was reputedly a factor in Asad's suspension of the negotiations in late-1995 (CSM 16 June 1995:5; Moore 1994:76–79).

Given the geographic disadvantage it would face if it abandoned the Golan Heights, Israel also wanted a limited forces zone requiring a virtual Syrian pull-back to Damascus. Syria accepted demilitarization of the Golan, but wanted demilitarization and limited forces zones to be equal on both

sides of the border, which Israel refused (Moore 1994:78–79). Israel wanted to retain an observation post on Mount Hermon and Syria demanded, in exchange, one on Mount Canaan near Safad (*MEM* 22 October 1993). At US urging, a second meeting of the chiefs of staff of the two countries was held in June 1995 to attempt to bridge these differences; Syria conceded that demilitarized zones would not have to be equal on both sides of the border (proposing a 10:6 ratio in Israel's favour), and Israel reputedly accepted much reduced limited forces zones. Also in the second meeting of the chiefs of staff, details such as joint border patrols and surveillance stations were discussed. The negotiations stalled over an Israeli demand for an early-warning surveillance station on Mount Hermon. Syria rejected this, insisting aerial or satellite surveillance was adequate and that a continued Israeli presence there would be an affront to Syrian sovereignty. Egypt had not had to accept such an Israeli presence in the Sinai and Asad could never concede more than the vilified Sadat had. Syria took the view that Rabin, lacking the domestic political standing to actually reach an agreement with Syria and knowing full well that such a demand was unacceptable, had raised it to stall the negotiations. Asad withdrew from the military talks in mid-1995 (*APSD* 3–10 July 1995; *CSM* 15 March 1995, p. 19).

Many observers believed 1995 was the crucial year: no irreconcilable obstacles remained to an agreement, but, given the possibility of a Likud election victory in 1996, the 'window of opportunity' would not last beyond that year (Moore 1994:60–61; Muslih 1994). Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations were given a new boost by the change of leadership in Israel after the assassination of Yitzak Rabin. The new Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, had publicly acknowledged that the Golan was Syrian territory. The seemingly greater priority he put on reaching a settlement with Syria, and the apparent post-assassination shift in Israeli public opinion in favour of the peace process, was enough to lure Asad back to the bargaining table in late 1995. However, no breakthroughs were forthcoming and the 1996 HAMAS bombings in Israel and the Israeli election campaign prompted Peres to suspend negotiations.

The May 1996 Likud election victory put an Israeli-Syrian peace settlement in grave jeopardy. However, the claim that Asad failed to reach an agreement with the Labour government because he never wanted one does not stand scrutiny. If he was not serious about peace he need never have made the many concessions which put an agreement within striking distance. It was Peres, not Asad, who suspended the negotiations and it was Netanyahu, not Asad, who came to power committed to undoing the many areas of agreement reached with Syria under the Labour government.

Syria's intentions have been questioned because it hosted the offices of rejectionist groups, particularly HAMAS and Islamic Jihad, whose terrorist

attacks in Israel arguably contributed to the election of Netanyahu. However, these groups are not under Syrian control, they are indigenous to the occupied territories and their violence is essentially a function of rage at Israel's reluctance to evacuate these areas. For Syria, Islamicist violence is a legitimate expression of national resistance to occupation. Asad asked why Syria should be expected to ban Palestinian rejectionists when Israel was not asked to silence Israeli extremists opposed to the Oslo accord (*MEM* 4 October 1993, pp. 10–11). Far from being a manifestation of Syrian rejectionism, Syria has viewed their activism as strengthening its hand in the peace process by demonstrating that Israel cannot have *both* land and peace.

It can more plausibly be argued that Asad erred in not reaching an agreement with the Labour government while he had the chance. However, there is no evidence that the many concrete differences between the two sides had actually been bridged when negotiations were suspended. Asad refused to allow Israel to use the possibility of a Likud victory to stampede him into further concessions or into a vague, piecemeal and open-ended agreement like that reached at Oslo. Syria's negotiating strategy has always been to insist on detailed, comprehensive and iron-clad agreements; Israel's arbitrary interpretation of the Oslo accords at the PLO's expense could only have reinforced Asad's determination not to be similarly trapped. Specifically, he would accept no agreement without a definite timetable for Israeli withdrawal, nor would he accept one which left withdrawal contingent on Israeli satisfaction with the progress of normalization.

To be sure, Asad must have been profoundly ambivalent about the desirability of the kind of peace with Israel which seemed attainable after Oslo. The calculus of geopolitical costs and benefits was far from uniformly favourable: benefits would include recovery of territory, access to Golan water, the security gain from Israeli withdrawal from the Golan where they readily threaten Damascus, greater access to the Western-dominated world market, greater private capital investment under peace and possibly an international aid package. On the cost side, however, Syria risked losing its regional role based on Arab defence against the Israeli threat. This could cost it the Arab aid to which this role has entitled it, although that aid had rapidly declined and it was unlikely Syria could anticipate access to more aid if it refused a settlement. The sort of settlement shaping up threatened to leave the Palestinians and Jordan to an Israeli sphere of influence, depriving Syria of its regional role, although this was perhaps an irreversible *fait accompli*. Its economy could also be threatened by Israeli penetration. The alliance with Iran and hegemony in Lebanon might be put at risk. Asad was concerned about his place in history as an Arab nationalist. The regime had also to calculate whether the bases of internal legitimacy could be shifted

away from Arab nationalism without jeopardizing stability; but equally, it had to fear how viable the regime would be isolated from an Arab world at peace with Israel. That Asad had continued serious negotiations in these circumstances is an indicator that he had bowed to reality and accepted a major scaling down of his view of Syria's strategic interests and an Israeli peace for the Golan.

If, however, Netanyahu refuses to return the full Golan Heights to Syria, there is little chance of a Syrian-Israeli peace. Asad will probably decide to bide his time until there is a further change in Israeli leadership or strategy or a favourable shift in the balance of power. Syria still retains considerable leverage in Middle East peace diplomacy. Without Syria's imprimatur no Arab-Israeli peace can arguably be legitimate and hence durable. If its interests are not satisfied, Syria can obstruct Israel's full incorporation into the Middle East; if the Likud back-peddles on Israel's commitments to peace, it will enhance Syria's ability to force a halt in further Arab-Israeli normalization. If the Likud government's main concern is security, a peace agreement with Syria offers the most practical opportunity to neutralize the main military threat Israel faces. The threats of Islamic fundamentalism and Israel's vulnerability to chemically or biologically armed missiles could also be much reduced by a Syrian peace. If Syria remains excluded from a settlement, it can continue to threaten Israeli security in small but bothersome ways. Asad could encourage Hizbollah pressure on Israel's security zone in Lebanon. He could attempt to mobilize the significant numbers of Diaspora Palestinians abandoned and embittered by the Oslo agreement. Anti-Oslo groups like HAMAS and Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP—GC) can pull off spectacular anti-Israeli operations. Such a strategy would be risky but Syria probably retains a sufficient military deterrent against Israel to make it less than suicidal. Finally, Syria can continue to exploit Washington's belief that the main threats to regional stability, Iraq and Iran, could be neutralized if Syria was pulled into a peace settlement. Conversely, a Syria alienated from the peace process, in alliance with Iran, and potentially Iraq, could conceivably destabilize the Middle East. If Israel truly wants a peace settlement with Syria, the window of opportunity remains open.

THE BA'TH REGIME AND THE POLITICS OF PEACE

Regime autonomy and the peace process

It once appeared to certain pundits that the Syrian Ba'th regime neither wanted nor could survive a peace with Israel. Syria's authoritarian minority-ruled regime, they insisted, fostered confrontation abroad to justify repressive

rule at home and to extract the military and financial largesse the conflict funnelled into its coffers (Pipes 1990). Today it seems increasingly obvious that this view was a great exaggeration. Far from Syrian foreign policy being the product of domestic politics, the regime enjoys relative autonomy in the conduct of its foreign policy. This is not to argue there are no constraints on Asad's foreign policy decisions, only that they are *indirect*: political wisdom dictates he take account of their impact on his domestic constituencies and on the wider nationalist legitimacy of the regime. The domestic risks to his rule from involvement in the peace process appear to be declining.

Asad must, presumably, be sensitive to elite opinion. Although he has shown that he is willing to be out in front of it, he tries to govern by intra-elite consensus rather than imposing his views. There apparently was dissent in the elite over acceptance of the 1991 US invitation to the Madrid peace conference which accommodated few of Syria's traditional procedural conditions. Asad's attempt to forge a consensus may have accounted for the time-lag in accepting it. Throughout the subsequent negotiations, Vice-President Khaddam has, by comparison to Asad, been outspokenly anti-Israel but he has always been Asad's faithful lieutenant and this could be a tactic to give the appearance that Asad faces constraints which prevent him making concessions. In reality, none of his lieutenants have seriously challenged or constrained Asad's foreign policy.

The Alawi security barons were reputedly unhappy with the prospect of peace negotiations, perhaps for fear they would be the victims of internal political liberalization or a foreign policy realignment towards the West which might accompany a peace. The army may fear its dominant societal role would be threatened by peace and Israeli demands for downsizing in force structure. Recently, observers (Lifton 1994:10) thought senior security chief Ali Duba and several of his subordinates had been fired by Asad to 'remove...centers of power that could resist the restructuring of the army in the post-peace era'. Actually, Duba remains in power, but a shake-up amongst his subordinates reflected Asad's policy of rotation to prevent clientage networks congealing into fiefdoms beyond his control. As long as the President keeps a hand on appointments and dismissals, no baron can staff his domain with durable clients and stand against him.

It is, moreover, not a foregone conclusion that the Alawi and military elites cannot adapt to post-war conditions. They would retain their dominant positions in the officer corps and security forces, even if these are scaled down. Though officers have been told to expect cuts after peace, Alawi-dominated elite units such as the presidential guard will be the core of a slimmed-down professional army. The Syrian military was unnerved by the easy defeat of Iraq and is aware that another war, in which it could be devastated, might be the alternative to the

peace process. Asad has portrayed the peace process to the army as an honourable struggle: 'Our stance in the battle for peace will not be less courageous than our stances on the battlefield' (*SWB* 3 August 1993). The Alawis' business connections to the Sunni bourgeoisie should allow them to share in any economic prosperity that accompanies peace, and while they may have accumulated their capital through illicit means this does not mean they cannot invest it in legitimate business.

The Ba'th party might be expected to reject a peace settlement that does not measure up to Ba'thist standards and threatens it with the loss of its nationalist *raison d'être*. Yet the Ba'th party has been downgraded, de-ideologized, and turned into a patronage machine with little capacity for independent action. It has not made key decisions, above all in the foreign policy field, in a long time. Asad no longer appears at party functions and either party national secretary Abdullah al-Ahmar or Vice-President Khaddam stands in for him. A party congress is overdue by four years, perhaps because Asad would have to publicly defend foreign policies, notably the peace process, before they have delivered results. The party central committee was, however, assembled to hear the regime's justification for entering the peace process: it brought together the Regional Command—the one body which assembles the top elite of generals, top party *apparatchiki* and senior ministers—with the second rank elite—party branch secretaries and committees, governors, university presidents, leaders of the popular organizations, junior ministers, army commanders and chairmen of Peoples' Assembly committees. Party secretaries Suleiman al-Qaddah and Abdullah al-Ahmar and Prime Minister Mahmoud al-Zubi presided, while Khaddam addressed the assembly. The assembled elites approved the peace process and dispersed to justify it to their constituents (*SWB* 23 July 1991).

Asad has also eased his dependence on the Alawi barons and the Ba'th party by co-opting the Sunni bourgeoisie more securely into the regime coalition through further economic liberalization. Although the bourgeoisie was ambivalent or split over the kind of peace that was shaping up, it was largely prepared to accept whatever Asad decided on. Though some Syrian businessmen fear Israeli dumping on the internal market under normalization of relations, most merchants believe Syrian commercial acumen will allow them to compete. Some fear Syria will face competition from Israel's superior technology in the Saudi and Gulf markets they want for themselves. Although they hope Asad will obstruct overly rapid normalization in Syria and the Arab world in general, they understand that a stable peace is needed for long-term investment and that Syrian business must learn to compete on the international market.

It is frequently argued that economic constraints have forced Syria into the peace process. There is scant evidence that Asad has ever allowed

economic constraints to force foreign policy decisions that would not otherwise have been taken on strategic grounds. Indeed, the 'tactical rejectionism' of the 1980s coincided with a resource crisis and economic troubles which ought to have made Syria more vulnerable to economic pressures. Conversely, Asad joined the current peace process at a time when a combination of austerity at home and a windfall of aid for Syria's stand in the Gulf war, had lifted the economy out of the doldrums. To be sure, the diversification of Syria's dependence on external resources—its balancing between Eastern bloc, European and Iranian, and Gulf Arab aid—which formerly eased the constraints any one donor could otherwise have put on Syria's options, has declined. But, during the period of the peace negotiations, economic constraints have faded into the background and there is little reason to think that such factors would force Syria to abandon its strategic goals in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Moreover, the economic consequences of a peace settlement do not uniformly attract or repel the regime sufficiently to be a decisive factor in its foreign policy calculations. In the short run, the Arab financial aid to which Syria has been entitled as a frontline state has declined and cannot be said to provide a motive for avoiding peace; this is particularly so because, as the Arab-Israeli conflict is defused, it will continue to decline regardless of Syrian policy. It has, at least, been channelled through the state, however, while much of the investment the regime could expect after a peace would bolster the private bourgeoisie—appeasing but also strengthening a social force which the state cannot wholly trust.

In the long run, both regime and bourgeoisie realize that sustained economic prosperity requires a peace settlement. With the collapse of the socialist bloc, the country needs further incorporation into the world capitalist economy; as statist development strategies reached their limits, the economy has become increasingly dependent on private investment (Arab, expatriate or Western). Syria understands that it will not be removed from the US 'terrorist list', an obstacle to integration into the global economy, until it signs a peace treaty with Israel. Nor does a 'no-war-no-peace' situation, isolated from an Arab world at peace with Israel, provide a favourable investment climate for private capital. The regime needs a growing economy to appease the bourgeoisie and to absorb the burgeoning numbers of job seekers fuelled by high population growth.

Public opinion sets certain indirect bounds on policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. No nationalist regime—especially an Alawi-dominated one—could, without grave risk, accept a dishonourable peace. Much, however, depends on what the public perceives to be an honourable or realistic settlement. The vast majority of Syrians has long wanted a peace settlement entailing full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines and Palestinian

rights. The kind of peace Syria is currently likely to attain, however, will fall far short of that. An Israeli-controlled autonomy administration in the West Bank and Gaza leaving Diaspora Palestinians in limbo will be difficult to depict as an achievement of Palestinian rights. A return of the Golan will bring an unwelcome normalization of relations with Israel. Such a settlement will be hard to depict as a vindication of the Ba'th's 30-year struggle.

Public opinion is, however, not unchanging. After the 1973 war, the regime accustomed a formerly rejectionist public to accept an eventual peace settlement. Once Syria entered the current peace talks, the Syrian media began to promote the economic benefits of peace. Asad's commitment to 'normal relations' with Israel during the January 1994 Asad-Clinton meeting was broadcast to Damascus.

Most recently, public opinion seems to be embracing a significant reduction in its conception of an acceptable peace, putting the regime in a better position than ever before from which to sell the less than comprehensive settlement which appears on the cards. This sea change in opinion was precipitated by the Oslo accord in which the Palestinians took their own road to peace with Israel. Syria, most Syrians feel, cannot reject a settlement that the Palestinian leadership itself accepts. The regime has successfully argued that the PLO's submission to Israel deprived Syria of the diplomatic leverage to help win the liberation of the West Bank and Gaza. The subsequent Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty convinced Syrians that Syria could not afford to sacrifice opportunities to achieve its own vital interest in a return of the Golan. In a September 1994 speech to parliament Asad observed that 'for decades Syria waged the Arabs' battle against the Israeli occupation' and carried the principal burden of the confrontation; now, however, the 'enormity of the damage that unilateralism [of the Jordanians and Palestinians] has inflicted on the core of the causes for which we have long fought and struggled' was unambiguously clear (*MEIn* September-October 1994, p. 8). In these conditions, Asad, perceived by Syrians as having been consistent in his struggle for an honourable peace and so far less ready to bend before Israeli power than other Arab leaders, was generally trusted to get the best settlement possible.

There has even been a sort of backlash against pan-Arab commitments. Many Syrians felt betrayed by the other Arab leaders and began to think of themselves more as Syrians. Arab nationalist dreams were no longer considered realistic standards by which to judge foreign policy. This, potentially shrinking the unit of political identity and turning Syrians inward to their own affairs, may seem compatible with the sort of peace that is shaping up; however, a Syrian identity has not become a viable substitute for Arabism, and the regime will continue to see its legitimacy linked to a leading role in inter-Arab politics.

The regime will not face much overt resistance to normalization of relations with Israel because the Israeli presence in Syria is likely to be token. But even this, being forced on Syria, is unlikely to reduce public animosity against Israel, at least in the short run. While their concern for the Palestine cause has declined, Syrians' hostility to Israel has not, and many are emotionally resistant to the prospect of relations with Israelis. But the Syrian public now so takes a resolution of the conflict for granted that people speak of '*bad as-salaam*'—after the peace (CSM 6 December 1995).

The bottom line is that there appears to be no irresistible domestic pressure on the regime to either reject the sort of deal with Israel which now seems plausible or to make concessions to Israel in order to reach one. It is often claimed that the domestic political needs of authoritarian regimes push them towards belligerent and expansive foreign policies. In the Syrian case the opposite has been true. In the more pluralistic but weak pre-Asad state, rival politicians invariably sought public support by 'outbidding' each other in militancy towards Israel; since the consolidation of Asad's regime, foreign policy is determined largely by a *raison d'état* which is quite compatible with the peace process.

Regime stability and the transition to peace

Would a Syrian-Israeli peace endure? Asad certainly has the power to prevent domestic resistance to it. Asad's sense of honour dictates that he respect his agreements; even his arch foe, Menachem Begin, referred to him as a man 'who has always kept his agreements'. As the peace on the Golan Heights since 1974 suggests, if Syria reaches an agreement with Israel it will be scrupulously adhered to. Israel's military deterrent, security arrangements on the Golan and the end to the Golan as a grievance locking Syria into the struggle with Israel, would make Syrian initiation of a military conflict highly unlikely (Eisenstadt 1995).

But is the regime that signs a peace with Israel likely to survive for long the two looming challenges it faces, the end of the era of confrontation and leadership succession? Even an 'honourable' peace would require the regime to adapt, notably to public expectations of some political liberalization and to find a substitute for the Arab nationalist ideology that has helped to cement its support base. But the kind of settlement currently on the cards is unlikely to win the regime much political capital which it could expend in the transition to the era of peace. Its current attempts to prepare itself for the transition give mixed signals as to the likely outcome.

The main threat to regime stability may well be a succession crisis. Indicative of the extent to which Syria's political institutions have been

weakened by the personalization of power is the fact that the most credible succession scenario has been dynastic. Asad appeared to be grooming his son Basil for succession until he was killed in an automobile accident. Another son, Bash'shar Asad, has taken over Basil's role as his father's right-hand man, but he lacks Basil's popularity and military experience.

An alternative scenario is collective leadership. The dominant elite, in power for decades, is close knit. Asad has reputedly appointed a committee of the elites to steer a succession. While the regime institutions themselves have little autonomy, the men who head them are strong and experienced and they may well stick together in the succession. As long as they do, they have the firepower, demonstrated ruthlessness and stake in regime survival to turn back any challenge from below. Moreover, they face no viable counter-coalition which could challenge them. In the long run, however, collective leadership appears unsustainable. If a peace settlement is not reached before succession or if one reached is widely perceived to be illegitimate, it is entirely possible that it could become an issue in a succession power struggle.

Asad appears, however, to be altering his regime to prepare for the post-peace era. He has firm control of the army, security police and bureaucracy. The Ba'th party still incorporates a Sunni and rural base that Asad needs—if only to balance the Alawi *jama'a* and the Sunni urban bourgeoisie. On the other hand, Asad is pursuing a strategy of calculated political decompression as a substitute for substantial political pluralization. This denotes more securely incorporating more elements of the bourgeoisie into his regime to balance the Alawis and the Ba'thists. It also means relaxing state control over society, with the aim of releasing private energies able to assume a larger share of the burdens of development; and it means adapting political structures to absorb the participation pressures this may stimulate without loss of regime control or autonomy. The regime may be able to preserve the current political system with merely modest adaptations, namely, a greater opening to the strongest forces hitherto opposed to it—the bourgeoisie and the Islamists.

Politically, a bourgeois class organized and conscious enough to constrain regime autonomy hardly exists. Rather, Asad's co-optation of fractions of it allows him to divide it and to play it off against other classes in the regime's constituency. Asad's strategy of co-optation takes several forms. Members of old families have been brought into government. The Chambers of Commerce and of Industry have growing access to government and ability to defend bourgeois interests. Parliament, previously overwhelmingly dominated by the Ba'th party and its allies, has been expanded to include independents, thus co-opting a broader array of societal forces. Perhaps indicative of the new confidence of the bourgeoisie is the 1994 parliamentary

election campaign of Ihsan Sankar, a millionaire Mercedes dealer. He reportedly spent millions of Syrian pounds on his campaign and openly announced his intention to work for reversal of such populist measures as rent control, land reform ceilings and the progressive tax code and to push for a stock exchange and private education. Independents in parliament have not, however, organized as a bloc to contest government policy and they seek parliamentary seats mostly for prestige, privileges (such as the right to import and sell a car at a big profit) and for political access. Parliament advances the regime's strategy of co-optation: the regime nominates influential people in the neighbourhoods as candidates and allows deputies some degree of patronage and scope to intervene on behalf of constituents with the bureaucracy.

The bourgeoisie seems prepared to defer demands for political power: rather than leading a democracy movement, it has been satisfied by Asad's distancing himself from the Ba'th, co-opting of more of its own into government and according it greater political access. Since the inegalitarian consequences of economic liberalization are likely to heighten popular discontent, the bourgeoisie no more wants full democratization than does the regime. But the Sunni bourgeoisie does want a full partnership in the regime while the Alawis still want to keep the upper hand.

Regime stability and a stable peace both depend on bourgeois investment replacing wartime 'rent' and generating the prosperity needed to make the peace palatable. Investment under the 1991 Law No. 10 to encourage private and foreign capital has exceeded that of the public sector in recent years; by 1993, around US\$1.8 billion had been put into 474 Law No. 10 projects, mostly tertiary, and some light manufacturing such as food industries. Sources of capital formation are diversifying. Gulf money is coming in—some going to the public sector as the continuing reward for Asad's stand against Iraq in the second Gulf war—but an increasing share is taking the form of private investment. Expatriate capital is testing the waters. The village *petite bourgeoisie* has given rise to a Ba'thi-connected business strata and the *suq petite bourgeoisie* has generated indigenous industrialists such as the Saif brothers. Private investment companies tolerated by the regime recently mobilized tremendous hidden middle-class savings which government banks had failed to tap. Syria enjoyed growth rates of around 8 per cent per year from 1990 to 1993.

Much of the new investment was possibly a temporary boom. Sharp operators took immediate advantage of Law No. 10 to set up phoney car rental agencies to get around the state monopoly and import cars. The failure of many speculative private investment companies may cause a liquidity crisis. Constraints on investment are built in to the political system, including fear of post-Asad instability, bureaucratic obstruction and

corruption rampant at every level: business has to pay off the barons in order to get projects and the best opportunities are reputedly reserved for friends of the regime. Long-awaited further reforms necessary to sustain private investment, notably permitting private banking and a stock market, have not been forthcoming. However, economic liberalization is according the bourgeoisie greater autonomy to reconstruct a business-centred civil society and the regime, having opted to depend on private capitalist investment, cannot reverse the current tendency to respond, albeit incrementally, to the bourgeoisie's expectations of greater rule of law and a more favourable investment climate.

The Islamic movement has represented the main opposition to the Ba'th regime. While the regime crushed its uprising in the early 1980s, there remains an anti-regime Islamic opposition in exile which could exploit a peace settlement with Israel. Broadcasting from Iraq, it accuses the Asad family of being ready to trade peace with Israel for money and continued power over Syria. Stability and advances in political liberalization depend on a historic compromise between the Ba'th and political Islam.

Asad, well aware of this, has put a high priority on reconciliation with political Islam. Since the collapse of the USSR and socialism, he has been developing the 'Islamic card', fostering Islam in the media, portraying himself as pious and generally trying to add Islam to the regime legitimacy formula as Ba'thism erodes. To this end, Asad has tried to bring the Alawis into the Islamic mainstream, building mosques in the mountains and depicting them as genuine Muslims. Basil Asad's funeral was presided over by a Sunni cleric and the Alawi sheikhs were shown in Sunni rituals as if there was little difference between the sects. He has fostered a conservative (al-Azhar-like) Islamic establishment to channel Islamic currents and legitimate the regime. Some Islamists have been co-opted as independents into parliament. To the very considerable extent that the Islamic opposition expressed the reaction of the *suq* and sections of the bourgeoisie to Ba'thist socialism, economic liberalization could advance a *détente* with the regime.

Another main challenge facing the regime is to preside over economic liberalization without excessively damaging and alienating its original populist (rural *petite bourgeois*/worker/peasant) constituency. The government-employed middle class has been squeezed between inflation, recently running at 15 per cent a year, and the government's refusal to raise salaries for four consecutive years. The poor are not yet paying the full costs of liberalization. Although subsidies have been cut, driving up the price of necessities such as *mazout* (heating fuel) and bread at their expense, these commodities are still sold below cost. The urban-rural gap does not appear to be widening. Fertilizer subsidies for peasants have been cut, but

producer prices increased. Agriculture is booming and villages seem prosperous, with much new building of schools and mosques.

The mobilization of opposition to pro-capitalist policies requires a populist ideology which is currently lacking: Marxism has lost credibility while opposition Islam, which has elsewhere mobilized the victims of economic liberalization, has in Syria so far espoused a free market ideology. But economic discontents, if fused with nationalism and radical Islam, could still generate counter-regime activism. Such a scenario cannot be excluded if the regime is perceived to become a client of the West or to have made a dishonourable peace settlement. Whether a settlement with Israel becomes a potent opposition grievance depends on whether it is perceived as just and rooted in mutual interests. Assuming a settlement returns the Golan to Syria, its legitimization is likely to depend on whether it also satisfies Palestinian rights in the longer term.

If the peace settlement lacks legitimacy it will always be vulnerable. But, if it has some legitimacy, it could generate powerful interests with a stake in preserving it. It would probably produce an influx of private, Arab and foreign investment, bolstering bourgeois civil society, tying Syria further into the international political economy and proliferating transnational ties with the Western world. This could accelerate internal pluralization and ultimately open the foreign policy process itself to the constraining impact of domestic and transnational economic interests.

In summary, as Asad's foreign policy goals are altering, he is making the internal alterations needed to preserve regime autonomy and stability in an era of peace. By diversifying and broadening the regime coalition, he has enhanced his ability to balance above it. Economic alternatives to wartime 'rent' are already being fostered by economic liberalization. As Arab nationalism becomes less relevant as a basis of legitimacy, the regime is seeking it in greater economic liberalism and prosperity and political decompression. The likely peace settlement is probably a legitimacy liability, but it is rendered less dangerous by a subtle alteration in national identity away from Arabism and towards a Syrian identity more compatible with scaled-down foreign policy goals.

IRAN AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Iran was profoundly opposed to the peace process on ideological grounds. But, because it was not a direct party to the confrontation, its practical means for opposing it were limited. To be sure, it could try to derail the process through financial support of rejectionists or, more directly, through the activities of Hizbollah in southern Lebanon, but the latter option was constrained by Syrian sufferance for its role there and its need to preserve

the strategic alliance with Damascus. As such, Iranian opposition remained largely on the level of rhetoric and, as this provoked a backlash which threatened to isolate Iran, this rhetoric was itself gradually muted. Nevertheless, the issue remained a potent ideological talisman and an issue in internal Iranian politics.

Iran has been critical of the peace process from the start and especially so under Ayatollah Khomeini. When in 1988 the PLO accepted UN Resolution 242, thereby recognizing Israel, Iran declared that no organization had the right to give away 'even an inch of the Islamic land of Palestine'.

The Islamic republic has supported the annihilation of the so-called Israeli regime and the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem. Any step leading to the recognition of and ensuring the security...of the Zionist regime occupying Palestine [is]...contrary to the interests and unalienable rights of the Palestinian nation and Islamic world...A Palestinian state on the *entire* Palestinian territory is a sacred ideal.

(SWB 17 November 1988; emphasis in original)

Breaking with the PLO, Iran assumed patronage of rejectionist Palestinian groups such as that of Ahmad Jabril (SWB 28 August 1989) as well as backing Hizbollah's activities in southern Lebanon.

The post-Khomeini dual leadership of Rafsanjani and Khamenei opted for a more pragmatic foreign policy and, in consolidating itself, successfully purged Khomeini's radical disciples, notably former Interior Minister Mohtashemi. Yet they themselves no more accepted the legitimacy of Israel than did the radicals, and the latter, though out of power, still had the ability to embarrass the new leaders on this most sensitive of ideological issues. Mohtashemi thundered:

Those who want to confine the Islamic revolution to the geographical frontiers of Iran are advocating de-Islamization and are straying from the ideas of Imam Khomeini. The struggle against the United States and its illegitimate child, Israel, is part of the imam's political line and Iranian diplomacy must be based on this struggle, as well as holy war against oppression, and not on compromise.

(SWB 5 June 1990)

The pragmatists had no intention of being outflanked on the Palestine issue. Rafsanjani denounced Israel's importing of Soviet immigrants as part of a plan for an empire from the Nile to the Euphrates (SWB 23 April 1990). In December 1990, they convened the first Islamic Conference on Palestine. Ayatollah Khamenei received the leaders of Islamic Jihad, Sheikh

Abdul al-Aziz Awdau and Dr Fathi al-Shaqaqi (SWB 11 December 1990), the leaders of Hizbollah and of a multitude of other rejectionist groups. From the sidelines Mohtashemi criticized Iran's 'weak' support for the *intifada* and Lebanese Islamic movements. 'I think we should internationalize the *intifada*. We must start to support [it] economically...regularly finance the *intifada* and also ask other countries to do so. We must provide military training for the Palestinians' (SWB 18 December 1990).

Iran opposed the Madrid peace conference as an attempt to get Arab acceptance of Israel without its conceding Palestinian rights, and to impose Arab submission to Israel (SWB 15 May 1991). Khamenei denounced it as a plot sponsored by the 'Great Satan', the main advocate of the Zionist regime. 'The usurper and racist regime ruling over occupied Palestine must be destroyed and eliminated' and a Palestinian government in all of Palestine was the only solution. Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi declared that recognizing Israel meant cancelling all the struggles of the Palestinian people and accepting the greatest crime—depriving a country of its existence, rendering a nation homeless forever, and the final separation of a part of the body of Islam from it. The moderate Foreign Minister Velayati declared that the Palestine struggle went wrong from the start when it was based on something other than Islam. 'The people are prepared to lay down their lives for Islam, but they are less prepared to die for nationalism' (SWB 5 October 1991).

Ayatollah Khamenei located the Palestine issue in the larger struggle of Islam and the USA: the US aim was to suppress Islam in Palestine, the geographic heart of the Muslim world. If it could force Arab recognition of Israel, Tel Aviv could concentrate on its new mission of fighting Islamic movements, the main threat to the USA. A peace would also establish US hegemony, and Israel would have achieved a big step in its Greater Israel project. The Islamic world, having oil and a fourth of the world's population, had, however, no need to submit to this US dictat (Address of Ayatollah Khamenei in *The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Question of Palestine*, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Damascus, n.d.)

Other Iranian analysts also linked the peace conference to the larger global struggle. After the collapse of bipolarity, the world hegemonist powers were trying to impose a New World Order to confront the next era of the 'awareness of nations'. The USA aimed to create a unipolar world by dominating the Middle East since it was challenged in Asia and Europe. While 'one superpower now exists that dictates its viewpoints...this state of affairs will not last...as economic power in Japan and the EC grows'. Moreover, Islam was a major obstacle to US dominance. The Madrid objective was to allow Israel, the US surrogate, to penetrate the Arab world through economic subversion (SWB 11 November 1991).

Iran held a second rejectionist conference in support of the Islamic revolution in Palestine in Tehran 19–22 October 1991 which fortuitously coincided with the opening of the Madrid conference (SWB 3 October 1991). It was attended by 400 delegates from 60 countries including such Lebanese figures as Walid Junblatt, Sheikh Shabaan and Abbas al-Musawi, Afghan leader Burhaniddin Rabbani and Palestinian rejectionists Abu Musa and Ahmad Jebril. Khamenei declared that a PLO that sold out Palestinian rights was not representative of the Palestinians and the conference was supposed to create a rejectionist/Islamic substitute for it. Since many of the main radical Palestinian leaders, such as George Habbash, did not attend, this failed. The conference did, however, discuss the idea of a fund to support the *intifada* and an Islamic army to join it, as well as ways to ensure continuance of the economic boycott of Israel (SWB 22, 23 October 1991). HAMAS and Islamic Jihad were expected to be the main beneficiaries of Iranian support. Hizbollah's Secretary-General, Abbas al-Musawi, announced that it would intensify its activity to disrupt the peace talks. Except for the latter, and possibly some Iranian funding for Palestinian Islamists, nothing of practical importance resulted from this conference.

The Palestine issue appeared, however, to remain an issue in the intra-Iranian power struggle. Radicals remained a threat and, perhaps seeking to appease or outbid them, Ayatollah Khamenei seemed to pursue a more militant line potentially at odds with President Rafsanjani's moderate foreign policy. He was reputedly the force behind the Islamic conference and in demanding financial support for HAMAS and Hizbollah (*ME* February 1993, pp. 9–10, 17–18; *MEI* 6 November 1992, p. 12). It is possible that Rafsanjani and Khamenei were simply pursuing a division of labour: while Rafsanjani controlled practical policy implementation, Khamenei indulged in a largely symbolic ideological politics meant to disarm critics of their dual leadership.

However, in an appearance at the conference, Rafsanjani had displayed his own radical credentials. 'World arrogance' [the USA], having deployed massive military forces in the region, brought the Arab oil states and the Soviet Union to submit, and at the height of its power, believed the time was right to eradicate Palestine. But national convictions and the sacred character of Jerusalem for Muslims could not be effaced by an 'imposition conference' (*The Islamic Republic and the Question of Palestine*).

This may have reflected Rafsanjani's actual feelings; he claimed to have been imprisoned under the Shah for translating a book on the Palestine cause. However, his realist side came out in another key speech in which he acknowledged that opposition to the peace process was isolating Iran. The West made it a condition of normal relations that a country accept Israel. Israel's plans of an empire from the Nile to Euphrates had been thwarted by

popular movements like the *intifada* and revolutionary governments like Syria; but this front was crumbling as the Arabs made concessions. Iran was the only one of 180 countries which opposed the peace negotiations and that is why all the 'fuss' was being made about its arms acquisitions and why accusations were made against it of terrorism and of seeking atomic weapons (*SWB* 16 March 1993). Reputedly, Iran privately assured the USA that its opposition to the peace process was purely rhetorical and that its main interest was in regional stability. US intelligence reportedly denied that Tehran was actually financing HAMAS (*IEI* 15 March 1993; *Washington Report* April-May 1993, pp. 15-16).

Nevertheless, Israel perceived Iran as its main antagonist and claimed it was the main threat to regional stability. It wanted the USA to enforce a global embargo on weapons exports to Iran; it asserted that HAMAS' resistance to the peace talks was solely Iranian-inspired and insisted Iran headed a global Islamic terrorist network linked to the World Trade Center bombing. Israel's grand plan was to unite the USA, Israel and the Arabs against Iranian-sponsored Islamic terror and the Islamic bomb. Israel, according to Leon Hadar, was thereby trying to find a new menace which could revive its status as a US strategic asset, devalued with the collapse of the USSR (*Washington Report* July-August 1993, p. 6).

Israel must have been gratified when the USA announced its 'dual containment' policy. Martin Indyk, in a speech to the pro-Israeli think-tank from which he was recruited as Clinton's Middle East adviser, asserted that not only would Iraq remain under siege, but sanctions would be maintained against Iran, too. The USA would pressure countries globally to stop arms and nuclear-connected sales to Iran. It would push for limiting export credits by other countries and the World Bank to delay Iran's economic recovery as long as it threatened Western and Israeli interests. This was justified by the fear that containing Iraq but not Iran would shift the Persian Gulf power balance towards Iran. Dual containment was premised on the hostility of both Iraq and Iran; instead of continuing to build up one to balance the other, the USA would restrict the ambitions of both by relying on its own military supremacy, the Gulf war coalition and Israel (*MEI* 11 June 1993). The policy also aimed to send Iran the message that it could only escape from its isolation by accepting Israel. The risk was that by closing the door on Iranian hopes of normal relations with the West and obstructing its integration into the world economy, the USA removed the incentive for Iran to moderate its opposition to the peace process.

Iran strongly denounced the Palestinian-Israeli Oslo agreement both for ideological reasons and because it appeared to be a major step in advancing a US-sponsored regional order that excluded Tehran. Iran radio described it as a bridge to give Israel access to the Arab world, its markets

and resources. Ayatollah Yazdi saw the agreement as a conspiracy to stop the *intifada* and treason against the Palestinian refugees who would never be able, under its terms, to return to their homes (*SWB* 13, 15 September 1993). Velayati charged the agreement would turn the PLO into a bludgeon of the Israelis to hit the *intifada*. Rafsanjani called it treason against the Palestinian revolution (*SWB* 15 October 1993). Ayatollah Khamenei vowed the Palestine issue would not so easily be buried: Arafat was not the Palestine nation with the right to surrender its land. The Palestine issue was an Islamic affair and 'the *umma* was not those four treasonous kings and presidents who offered with both hands anything the Americans asked for'. The Americans threatened Iran with isolation. But the Islamic government, unlike the weak Arab regimes isolated from their own people, was not frightened of America and would not retreat before it (*SWB* 18 September 1993).

The Oslo accord, according to Iranian analysts, showed the failure of Arab nationalism whose leaders capitulated to Israel, attacked Iran (Saddam), and had undermined Islamic culture through 'so-called modernization'. But, according to Tehran, Muslims had not abandoned their aspirations for the liberation of Palestine. 'Those who believe that by obtaining a signature from a handful of Palestinians, the usurpation of this land has attained legitimacy and the Israeli regime has gained acceptance in the region, are labouring under a delusion' (*SWB* 21 September 1993).

What, however, could Iran do about the accord? Tehran radio insisted that Iran's resistance to it had encouraged Islamic Palestinian movements and Palestinian refugees (in Lebanon) who had risen against it (*SWB* 30 November 1993). Ayatollah Emami-Kashani, member of the Guardian Council, said Arafat was now 'unlawful' for his treasonous act of having surrendered Palestine to the usurper and there were rumours that Iran was seeking his assassination. The ayatollah also urged Islamic preachers to 'fill their sermons with slogans against Israel and the White House and the treasonous PLO leaders' (*SWB* 20 September 1993). Iranian and HAMAS leaders met to plan resistance to the accord (*SWB* 1 December 1993). Iran considered Lebanon its first line of defence and, according to the Arab press, proposed that Syria withdraw from the peace talks and cooperate with Iran to escalate the south Lebanon front. Perhaps alarmed by this, the USA warned it would hold Iran responsible if its 'hysterical opposition' to the agreement turned to active support of groups using violence to undermine it. But Syria rejected the Iranian proposal and Iran could do little without its cooperation (*MEM* 7 October, 16 December, 19 November 1993).

At a time when Rafsanjani's position was being undermined by the troubles of economic adjustment and falling oil revenues, the regime's largely rhetorical opposition to the peace process came under attack. In 1993 a group of clerics,

'Hizbollah-Qom', painted an alarming scenario in which Syria, after signing a peace agreement, would turn against Hizbollah and burn Iran's bridges with Lebanon's Islamic and nationalist forces. The outcome would be the loss of Palestine and Jerusalem, Israeli economic domination of the Middle East, Iran's isolation and increased economic pressure on it as oil prices were driven down and the USA tried to freeze it out of world-wide economic networks. Iran's passive policy was doing nothing to obstruct this scenario. Iran also feared Israeli encirclement through penetration of Azerbaijan (the world's other Shi'ite state), through normalization in the Gulf and through Kurdish north Iraq where the Israelis were said to be active. In Azerbaijan a top Muslim cleric had met with an Israeli envoy and Iran's diplomacy had failed to stop this Israeli advance. Israel was trying to paint Iran as the common foe in the Gulf. Meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Robert Pelletreau, admitted that the USA had tried to bloc Iran's debt rescheduling through the Paris Club and World Bank (*al-Wasat* in *MEM* 21 January, 9 May 1994).

The Iranian leadership tried to avert these threats by improving relations with Europe and Japan and by normalizing relations with Iraq. Iran clinched some bilateral economic deals with Germany, Japan and other Europeans, but complained that they tried to make economic relations contingent on Iran ending its opposition to the peace process (*MEM* 14 October 1993).

Internal criticism failed to produce a more assertive Iranian policy. Indeed, feeling under siege, Iran increasingly watered down its opposition to the peace process. Rafsanjani announced that, while Iran disapproved of the peace process, it would not disrupt it or break relations with Arab states, above all Syria, that made peace. Iran did not sever relations with Jordan after its treaty with Israel. 'Practically speaking, we do not take any action against the peace plan', Rafsanjani declared. 'When we see the whole process is unjust, we state our opposition as a matter of principle, but if the ... substance is just, we shall go along with it' (*Ettela'at* 12 July 1995, p. 1). Rafsanjani's prescription for countering the denial of Palestinian rights was to 'explain the plight of the Palestinian people and their usurped rights' to the world; there was 'no need to go to war' for 'one day the world will make a solution necessary' (Iranian Television, 25 December 1994, reprinted in *UIR* January 1995, pp. 10–11). Asked what would happen in south Lebanon after a peace treaty with Israel, Foreign Minister Velayati replied that Iran did not want to dictate to the Palestinians and Lebanese what they should do: 'I don't know what will happen later' [after an Israeli withdrawal] (*MEM* 8 June 1994, p. 15, 11 March 1994, p. 15). Rafsanjani, however, declared that Iranian military assistance to Hizbollah would end once Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon (*Washington Report* September 1995).

Iran did continue to champion and fund the Palestinian Islamist groups, HAMAS and Islamic Jihad, which carried out several terrorist attacks in Israel and arguably contributed to the election of the Netanyahu government. Iran may, as its critics claimed, have been satisfied at the setback this delivered to the peace process. However, the view that Palestinian Islamists are a mere instrument of Iranian rejectionism and state terrorism is grossly exaggerated.

To be sure, Iran and these groups share the perception that the Oslo accord has opened the door to the 'Bantustanization' of the Palestinians, not the realization of their national rights. Certainly, Israel's footdragging on turning over self-government powers to the Palestinians, its insistence on keeping all of Jerusalem, its maintenance and even expansion of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory linked to Israel by a new network of roads, the hardship imposed on Palestinian workers by the closure of access to Israel and the legal constraints and economic dependency by which Israel has sought to make the Palestinian territories mere satellites, all lent credence to this view and fuelled Islamic militancy.

While HAMAS does reject the legitimacy of Israel, whether it is rejectionist in practice is open to doubt. HAMAS offered the Israelis a truce in return for their evacuation of the occupied territories (*MEI* 22 January 1993, p. 17; *MEM* 22 April 1994, p. 13). The PLO was close to negotiating a HAMAS cease-fire with Israel and its participation in the elections for the Palestinian authority—in essence its inclusion in the autonomy scheme—when the Israeli assassination of an Islamic militant set off a new cycle of violence (*MEI* 20 October 1995, pp. 4–5). It is likely that, were Israel to permit the evolution of Palestinian autonomy into statehood, this process would moderate or marginalize rejectionist groups.

Ultimately, it is the policies of the Israeli government, more than anything Iran has done, which have precipitated Islamist terrorism. The fundamental fact is that the Islamist movements are indigenous to the occupied territories and are products of Palestinian grievances against occupation, not of the foreign policy ambitions of outside powers. They are not under Iranian control. Being Sunni, they lack the personal and religious ties of the Lebanese Hizbollah to Tehran. Nor are they dependent on Iran, having long received funding from Saudi sources and Muslims in the West. Indeed, HAMAS was initially fostered by the Israeli government itself as a counter to the PLO. For all these reasons, if Iran bears some indirect responsibility for the terrorist attacks against Israel, the Israeli government itself also shares such responsibility.

In conclusion, Iranian policy seemed torn between ideological opposition to the peace agreement and the need to preserve the alliance with Syria and avoid international and regional isolation. The dual leadership seemingly

believed it had to mute its opposition to the peace process to avoid being painted as a pariah state and excluded from regional economic and security ties. The fact that Iran could actually *do* little, beyond rhetoric and some financial aid to Islamist groups, as long as Syria was unready to jettison the peace process, no doubt encouraged it to restrain its verbal opposition. The idea that Iran used Islamist terrorism as a tool to derail the peace process is an exaggeration for, in reality, Palestinian Islamists acted for their own interests and the fate of the peace process is in the hands of the government of Israel, not that of Iran. Rafsanjani's low-profile strategy was contested by more militant groups who feared the peace process would end in the surrender of Palestinian rights, but Rafsanjani was apparently willing to risk being seen as soft on Israel internally in his realist defence of strategic interests externally.

THE SYRIAN-IRANIAN ALLIANCE AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

A successful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict which achieves Palestinian rights and the recovery of lost Arab territory would give the Palestinians and Syria an interest in the stability of the new Middle East order. Such an outcome could conceivably rupture the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Yet, until that happened, both were better able to cope with the peace process together than they would have been apart.

Syria's hand in the peace process benefited from the alliance. It could swing between Iran and the moderate pro-Western camp as a way of winning concessions in the negotiations (*MEM* 8 October 1993). Indicative of the success of this strategy was the apparent strong desire of the USA for a Syrian-Israeli peace as the key to isolating Iran and Iraq, the supposed main threats to regional stability (speech of Clinton's national security adviser, Anthony Lake, reported in *MEM* 19 May 1994). Rabin also saw the isolation of Iran as a strategic goal and Israel reputedly insisted Syria would have to break ties with Iran to recover the Golan (*MEI* 31 March 1995).

The peace process did put a strain on the alliance. Iran acknowledged that the two states' policies towards Israel were fundamentally different:

Iran rejects any type of compromise with the Zionist regime and believes that a solution to the Middle East problem is contingent on cleansing the area of the usurping and illegitimate regime, while Syria has accepted the implementation of UN resolutions that divide Palestine between the Zionist regime and the Palestinians.

(*SWB* 16 December 1993)

Iran was critical of the Syrian entry into the Madrid negotiations, warning Damascus that to get the Golan it was aiding US imperialism and weakening the cause of Muslim Palestine (*MEI* 26 July 1991, p. 7). A prominent Iranian Foreign Ministry official, Mohammad Javad Larjani, predicted Israel would withdraw from the Golan in return for a 'Syrian Camp David' in which the Palestinians would get nothing (*SWB* 21 October, 11 November 1991). Syria reputedly warned Iran to cease its criticism (*MEI* 11 October 1991, p. 11), but sought to appease it with assurances that it would not abandon its principles. Apparently reassured by the Syria-Israel deadlock in the negotiations, an Iranian commentary insisted Syria would not accept the concessions the USA was trying to force on it (*SWB* 24 September 1993).

The Oslo accord revived Iranian alarm over the peace process. Iranian Interior Minister Mohammad Ali Besharati told the Syrian ambassador it was more dangerous than Camp David (*SWB* 17 September 1993). To confront Oslo, Iran reputedly urged Syria to pull out of the peace talks and escalate the resistance in southern Lebanon. Iran would fund creation of a Lebanese-Palestinian Islamic front there to militarily challenge the accord. Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander Mohsen Rezai got Tehran to approve new heavy weapons to Hizbollah. But Syria rejected this, blocked transit of the weapons and refused to allow Hizbollah tanks and missiles stationed in the Bekaa, pulled out of the south as part of a cease-fire agreement with Israel, to be redeployed there. Syria cited the unfavourable power balance and argued that to join the rejectionists would cost it the cards it had to play in the peace process; it would neither support nor oppose the accord (*al-Hayat* in *MEM* 10 December 1993; *Sharq al-Awsat* in *MEM* 19 November 1993). Iran accepted this and the ceiling Syria put on Hizbollah activities in Lebanon (*MEM* 16 December 1993).

The Iranian decision to defer to Syria appears to have been a turning-point in muting its opposition to the peace process. The Iranian delegation meeting Asad in December 1993 as part of the third session of the Syrian-Iranian Higher Committee, made uncharacteristically dovish statements about the process, saying Iran would accept any arrangements on the Golan acceptable to Syria (*MEM* 16 December 1993; *SWB* 14 December 1993). Iran also stressed its ability to bolster Syria's leverage in the negotiations: 'Iran's political support for Syria can strengthen the position of Damascus and help organize Islamic countries to alter the equation in favour of the Muslims and the combatant and oppressed Palestinian people' (*SWB* 16 December 1993). It appears that the institutionalization of the alliance was proving effective in containing differences between the allies.

Iran seemed anxious, however, about Asad's January 1994 meeting with President Clinton (*MEM* 7 January 1994). The Iranian media reported that Clinton failed to get Syria to make the kind of big concessions made by

Sadat and Arafat and that Syria insisted on total withdrawal from the Golan. Syria, it believed, had winning cards, notably Hizbollah, which was stronger than ever (*SWB* 18 January 1993). Iran expressed impatience that Syria sent no envoy with the details of the talks, but Vice-President Khaddam reassured visiting Deputy Majlis Speaker, Hassan Rouhani, that no breakthrough was likely (*MEM* 8 April 1994; *SWB* 19 January 1994).

Were a peace settlement to be reached, and were Iran and Hizbollah to attempt to maintain the conflict in south Lebanon, it would fall to Syria to disarm and repress Hizbollah. Indeed, Syrian Defence Minister General Mustafa Tlas once promised to do just that once the Israelis withdraw from southern Lebanon. Nevertheless, Iran insisted that it would not allow Syrian participation in the peace process to threaten an alliance it regarded as strategic. Foreign Minister Velayati explained that Iran understood Syria was exposed to strong pressures from the USA while Rafsanjani declared: 'We have full confidence in the Syrian government and its friendship with the Islamic Republic and are not worried the Syrians would sacrifice their own interests and the rights of the Palestinians' (*MEM* 11 March 1995, p. 15). Parallel to this Iranian moderation, Hizbollah planned, in the event of a settlement, on a strategy of peaceful resistance to Israeli cultural and economic penetration of Lebanon (*Washington Report* September 1995). In mid-1995 Syria reputedly began preparing Iran for an agreement with Israel and Foreign Minister Velayati declared that 'the more a country gets close to the usurper regime [Israel], the more it will distance itself from us'. Rafsanjani, however, declared that 'If there is an agreement and Syria is content with it, we will be content' (*APSD* 3–10 July 1995).

The Syrian-Iranian alliance may well therefore survive a peace settlement. It will remain valuable to both as a way of balancing Israeli post-peace penetration of the Middle East. According to the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, Syria and Iran were in agreement that a peace agreement would not realize Arab national aspirations and risked Israeli economic penetration of the Arab world (interview with high-ranking diplomats, July 1994). Even after agreements are signed, Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab lands will be phased and Syria will have an interest in preventing normalization running too far ahead of it. Syria and Iran will continue to share an interest in minimizing Arab relations with Israel, especially if Palestinian rights remain unsatisfied and the peace remains, therefore, more of an extended truce than a definitive settlement. Fear of an Iranian-Syrian pincer, combining the ideologies of Arab nationalism and radical Islam, would be a better deterrent against the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia overly or prematurely developing relations with Israel than anything the two states could do separately. Iran sees the Syrian alliance as a counter to Israeli and American efforts to isolate it and make radical Islam a surrogate

for the vanished Soviet enemy. On the other hand, a pragmatic Iran may see the Syrian alliance as a post-peace link to the West and to the Arab world useful for getting out of its global isolation; Syria anticipates it would profit from playing such a role (*MEM* 8 April 1994, p. 12).

To the extent that a successful Arab-Israeli peace breaks down the barriers which have excluded Israel, Turkey and Iran from the Arab heartland by absorbing the Arab world into an undifferentiated 'Middle East system', new alignments could renew the value of the Syrian-Iranian alliance. The alliance could serve the new purpose of balancing Turkey's greater involvement in Middle East politics. Syrian-Turkish relations have been strained over historic Syrian resentment of Turkish annexation of Iskanderun and Turkish accusations of Syrian support for PKK 'terrorism' against Turkey. Disputes over Syrian rights to a share of the Euphrates' water Turkey controls have been acrimonious; the Turkish-sponsored 'peace pipeline' which would have channelled Euphrates' water to Israel was seen as a threat by Syria. Syria might have to fear Turkish-Israeli encirclement: the 1993 attempt by Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmat Cetin to strike an accord with Israel against 'terrorism', specifically Syrian support for Bekaa-based groups such as the PKK and Hizbollah, may be a sign of things to come (*MEM* 17 November 1993). Iran is also a rival of Turkey (and Israel) for influence in Central Asia, particularly in Azerbaijan, which has close links with the Iranian Azeri region. Iran has been blamed by Turkey for supporting PKK and Islamic terrorism inside Turkey. The Syrian-Iranian alliance would make for a classic checkerboard balance to a Turkish-Israeli one. From Syria's point of view it would also guard against the chance of Iran renewing its old Israeli alliance.

In the longer run, a successful Middle East peace would presumably reduce the threats and animosities which shape regional alliances. To the extent it initiated an intensified integration of the Middle East into the Western-dominated global market, replacing classic geopolitical rivalries with a growing web of economic interdependence, Syria and Iran would presumably have less need of their alliance. This appears, however, to be, at best, very much a long-term prospect.

The effect on the alliance of a peace process which ended Israel's isolation from the Arab world but left Syria and Iran out, is predictable. Syria and Iran would need each other more than ever since both would face isolation. They would wish to cooperate in orchestrating Islamic and rejectionist forces to discredit the peace, to deter the Gulf states from pursuing normalization with Israel and to resist Western military threats. In such a scenario, an incorporation of Iraq, especially a post-Saddam Iraq more friendly to Syrian Ba'thism or Iranian Shi'ism, into a new anti-Western, anti-Israeli alliance cannot be ruled out. Indeed, Israeli military

intelligence chief, Uri Saguy predicted a Syrian-Iraq-Iran war against Israel in two to five years if a Syrian-Israeli peace was not reached (*Jerusalem Post* 29 October 1994). A general breakdown of the peace process would produce much the same impact except that, conceivably, the Iranian-Syrian alliance could expand further. There could be internal upheavals which could realign key Arab states (such as an Islamic Egypt or Algeria), with a new militant Islamic-nationalist axis having Syria and Iran as its core.

CONCLUSIONS

The Syrian-Israeli peace process clearly demonstrates the limited and realistic goals of Syrian foreign policy and the ability of the regime to pursue a policy which, far from being a hostage to domestic instability, corresponded to national interests and the external balance of power. The Syrian-Iranian alliance, far from being a revisionist 'front', contributed to a moderation of Iranian policy towards the peace process. Iran, while opposed to an inequitable peace on grounds of principle, put its national interests in preserving the Syrian alliance ahead of ideology. Moreover, the alliance, in so far as it proved a counterbalance to Israeli hegemony and made Israel conscious of the risks of putting land over peace, can be said to have contributed to regional stability and to the peace process.

8 Conclusions

Regional middle powers in a penetrated regional system

The lessons of the Iranian and Syrian cases may have wider relevance. They reflect the special features of the Middle Eastern regional system and, as major actors in that system, their behaviour continues to affect that system. Moreover, these cases may have relevance to middle powers in other Third World regions.

THE ORIGINS OF ASPIRING MIDDLE POWERS: 'ANTI-IMPERIALIST' MOVEMENTS

The foreign policies of regional middle powers like Syria and Iran cannot be understood without analysis of the origins of these states. Global penetration and domination of the Middle East is exceptionally intense. Because of such penetration and the special appeal of transstate ideologies where the state frequently corresponds to no distinct national identity, the regional state system possesses precarious legitimacy. It is therefore vulnerable to the periodic rise of popular movements which generate radical regimes and set off realignments in the state system. The Islamic revolution in Iran and the Ba'th revolution in Syria are classic examples of this phenomenon.

The foreign policies of states which arise from such movements are initially inspired by revisionist ideologies such as Arab nationalism and pan-Islam, which typically impugn the legitimacy of the regional state system and, indeed, in their extreme forms, seek its overthrow. Moreover, elites of such regimes often use foreign policy as an instrument of internal power consolidation, notably in the generation of legitimacy. The combination of revisionist ideology and 'dramatic actor' (Calvert 1986) behaviour may result in pursuit of arguably irrational foreign policies which take insufficient account of the balance of power. As the great powers react punitively against revisionist states, often through local proxies (Israel against Syria; Iraq against Iran), these states are 'socialized', if they

survive, into the rules of the international system, forcing their adoption of realist policies.

In this way, ironically, regimes that rise out of movements rejecting the *status quo*, come, out of self-interest in survival, to accept conventional rules and, in thereby 'taming' the revisionist movements they incorporate, give the state system new staying power. In addition to this, the responsibility incurred by radical movements-turned-states for sustaining the health of their national economies requires that they attend to the requisites of capital accumulation and this, too, implies a certain integration into the world capitalist system. Unless such regimes build stronger states, however, they are unlikely to survive in a hostile world order.

STATE-FORMATION AND FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy disasters, weakness or foreign dependency may stimulate a reaction, a drive to consolidate the state internally as a base for a more effective foreign policy. War and war preparation are, in the Middle East, just as they were in Europe, crucibles of state-building. Contrary to misleading dichotomous assessments of regime strength, there has been a palpable strengthening of the state in aspiring regional middle powers in reaction to external threats.

For Syria, formidable external threats, above all from Israel, spurred a consolidation of a durable state which successfully contained internal instability. While Syria lacks resources comparable to Iran, Asad's state has proved able to mobilize significant resources for foreign policy ends and autonomous enough to exercise maximum flexibility in manipulating the external balance of power in rational actor fashion. The regime has endowed the state with a certain national 'role' which approximates conventional national identity and has turned Syria from a plaything of rival states into an important regional actor.

In Iran, likewise, the external threat, whether from Iraq or the USA, has been exceptional. The new Islamic and populist legitimacy of the revolutionary regime allowed an impressive war mobilization to check these threats, and war, in turn, was the crucible in which the state was consolidated. Although the top executive faces greater dissent and is more subject to bureaucratic politics than in Syria, the state can draw on a larger natural base of economic and military power to back its policy.

David's (1991) 'omni-balancing' model is useful in understanding Syrian and Iranian foreign policy in so far as it acknowledges the need of policy-makers to take account of both external and internal threats. But his assumption that internal threats are greater than external ones in the Third World, and that foreign policy is therefore more immediately shaped by

the former, does not apply to them. Rather, these cases seem to support Rosenau's (1971) prediction that leadership and systemic factors will outweigh internal politics factors, at least in consolidated authoritarian Third World states. However, the concept of omni-balancing could be revised to acknowledge that in certain Third World cases where external threats are real, they may precipitate a greater than average internal strengthening of the state; this could permit a more effective foreign policy which, while not ignoring the requisites of internal legitimacy or economic constraints, could still focus on managing the external arena.

The actual foreign policy goals of a consolidated regime cannot be fully understood without analysis of its role-conception. A role-conception implies some consensus on national identity and interest shaped by constants such as history and geography, and arguably gives more consistency to foreign policy than domestic politics models or approaches stressing the idiosyncrasies of leaders would suggest. In addition, however, regimes which originated in movements against Western penetration typically retain some aspiration to 'organize the regional system' against this penetration (rather than overthrow it), and therefore seek the status of regional middle powers. A viable role-conception for aspiring middle powers must reconcile residual revisionist sentiments with the realities of limited capabilities and the external power balance.

Despite ambitions at odds with the dominant global powers, the foreign policies of regional middle powers may nevertheless approach the model of a realist rational actor in matching ends and means. While their policies are often legitimized in terms of ideological ends, the actual goals of these regimes are typically limited and their strategies largely conventional: to balance external powers and their regional proxies and to create regional spheres of influence as buffers against external penetration.

FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING IN IRAN

The need to achieve an omni-balance between the management of the geopolitically shaped external environment, domestic legitimacy and economics underlies Iranian foreign policy. First, the origin of the regime in an ideological revolution initially imparted a revisionist drive to export the revolution, which challenged most of Iran's neighbours and encouraged Iranian intervention in Arab politics, notably through the mobilization of the Shi'a, alliance with Syria and an attempt to Islamicize the Arab-Israeli conflict. The war with Iraq which this precipitated and the failure to export the revolution against obstacles such as the Sunni-Shi'a gap, exhausted revolutionary messianism as a driving force in foreign policy. The regime is still dependent on revolutionary legitimacy, which is, however, now

manifest in foreign policy largely in symbolic 'dramatic actor' (Calvert 1986) behaviour.

Second, geopolitical constants, such as Iran's location, vulnerable to external powers, make it extraordinarily sensitive to threats to its national independence, traditionally deflected by balancing off rival powers; yet, as a large state straddling the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and Central Asia, it seeks spheres of influence in these regions. Shifts in the international and regional balance of power against Islamic Iran, manifest in defeats by Iraq, US intervention against Iran in the Gulf and UN Resolution 598 were decisive in shifting the internal intra-elite power balance towards factions advocating more realist foreign policies responding more to geopolitical factors than ideology.

Third, economic factors, cutting more than one way, influence Iranian foreign policy. Oil provides a base of power, particularly allowing acquisition of military capabilities, while control of oil revenues gives the regime autonomy internally. Yet a hydrocarbon-dependent economy and oil-fuelled import-substitute industrialization also made Iran very vulnerable to shifts in oil prices. Wartime economic crisis, of which the 1986 fall in oil prices was a watershed, was a major factor in the adoption of a realist foreign policy; continued economic constraints from low oil prices, foreign exchange shortages, debt and falling living standards reinforce this orientation.

Omni-balancing between these factors was shaped by policy-making structures and processes, above all leadership ideology and bureaucratic (factional) politics in a relatively autonomous state. Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological imperative and the early ascendancy of the clerical radicals over the liberals in the regime coalition initially funnelled revolutionary revisionism into foreign policy. Military defeats, however, undermined the radicals and precipitated a new realist faction which struggled to wrest power from them; Rafsanjani's appointment as army commander and his identification with the push to end the war with Iraq marked his ascendancy. The conflict between the Rafsanjani-Khamenei team and Montazeri and then Mohtashemi, especially over Lebanon policy which the radicals could use to obstruct Rafsanjani's moderate policy, were key power struggles. Economic troubles also strengthened the pragmatists' hand against the radicals. Khomeini's death allowed the pragmatists to consolidate foreign policy power in a dual leadership. The Faqih-President team has largely agreed on a pragmatic foreign policy, marginalizing but not vanquishing the radicals. Foreign policy still dimly reflects, largely in the rhetorical (dramatic actor) imperialist-bashing of Ayatollah Khamenei, some ability of the radicals and the 'New Right' to hold the regime to standards of ideological legitimacy.

With the muting of internal factionalism and ideological drive, policy is preoccupied with the other two objectives. The restoration of global ties crucial to economic health became a major priority. It also seeks to deflect geopolitical threats (such as American attempts to isolate Iran through dual containment and the peace process) and exploit opportunities (such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the opening of Central Asia to Iranian influence).

FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING IN SYRIA

Syria's regime also omni-balances between the external arena, internal legitimacy needs and economic constraints. The Ba'th regime originated in a revolution from above in which the state achieved autonomy of the dominant classes by mobilizing plebeian strata through a semi-Leninist party, through economical levelling of the bourgeoisie and through creation of a public sector. This regime, initially plagued by urban opposition and internal factionalism, sought legitimization through militant rhetoric against Israel while rival Ba'thi factions similarly outbid each other. Its reckless support for Palestinian guerrillas operating against Israel in spite of an overwhelming power imbalance against Syria invited the 1967 defeat. As such, domestic politics did, in this unstable and radical regime, substantially affect foreign policy. Asad's 1970 seizure of power aimed to end internal factionalism and unify regime and country for the struggle to recover the Arab territories occupied by Israel.

Geopolitics defines constants which came, under Asad, to shape Syrian foreign policy. While Syria's artificial origins generated a certain revisionism and a pan-Arab role-conception, the vulnerability of a small state surrounded by stronger rival states, especially its historic Israeli enemy, generates great insecurity and forces Syria to seek alliances to support its foreign policy. Also, Syria's limited capability forced replacement of revisionist with realist policies: recovery of the Golan lost to Israel in 1967 became Asad's main preoccupation. Radical pan-Arabism was eclipsed by a more circumscribed 'Syro-centric Arabism' as Syria's foreign policy role-conception. Recent unfavourable changes in the external balance of power, notably the collapse of the USSR, Syria's main patron, have been decisive in altering Syrian strategy towards greater reliance on diplomacy to reach its goals.

Syria lacks resources comparable to Iran's but modest oil reserves and external aid in support of its frontline role against Israel, state control of a large public sector and an alliance with the Soviet Union allowed the regime to build a military capability well in excess of what its domestic economic base would permit but which was essential to recovery of the occupied territories. Although the diversification of Syria's external dependency muted the constraints dependency placed on foreign policy, subsequently economic

stagnation from the enormous military burden, the collapse of the Soviet Union, greater consequent dependency on pro-Western Arab oil states and the need to revitalize the private sector while economically integrating into the world capitalist market have pushed Syrian foreign policy towards greater accommodation with the West and Israel.

Under Asad, the political structure has isolated domestic politics from directly influencing foreign policy. Asad constructed a Bonapartist regime which concentrated power in a 'presidential monarchy' resting on the party, army and bureaucracy. He maximized his autonomy through balancing between these forces: he used the support of the army to free himself from party ideological constraint; he then built up his *jama'a* of Alawi followers in command of intelligence agencies and praetorian guard units—to enhance his autonomy of both army and party. The party and its 'mass organizations' incorporated a significant segment of the population, including a Sunni-village and trade union base, while the bureaucracy absorbs a large state-dependent salaried middle class. Asad used limited economic liberalization to foster and co-opt elements of the bourgeoisie: this diversified the regime's economic base and enhanced the state's ability to balance between its original populist constituency and a new bourgeois one. The regime's legitimacy rested largely on consistency in pursuit of Arab nationalist goals.

The autonomy of the regime allowed Asad to approximate the 'rational actor' model in foreign policy. This is evident in:

- 1 his pursuit of realistic (not messianic) goals reflective of the 'national interest', notably his discarding of anti-Israeli revisionism for the limited goal of recovering the occupied territories;
- 2 the remarkable consistency in pursuit of this goal for a quarter century regardless of internal political vagaries or economic constraints;
- 3 the major upgrading of Syrian military capabilities, necessary to make Syrian diplomacy credible and deter Israel;
- 4 great tactical flexibility in adapting to threats and opportunities in the international arena, particularly in forging alliances and in mixing limited war and diplomacy (currently manifest in his adaptation to the collapse of bipolarity, specifically, his joining of the Gulf war coalition and the US-sponsored peace process);
- 5 the pursuit of policies which were unpopular at home when they served Asad's view of *raison d'état*.

ALLIANCE BEHAVIOUR

Alliance-formation by aspiring regional middle powers may, as Holsti (1982) shows, originate in an effort to break extreme dependency—as in

Iran's case. The Syrian-Iranian alliance was cemented by the need to counter common external threats, notably the pro-Iraq coalition during the Iran-Iraq war and the Israeli-American coalition in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion. Internal politics has had little bearing on the alliance.

The consequences of the alliance are in line with realist theory which suggests that instability-inviting power imbalances stimulate counterbalancing alliance-formation. Rather than chiefly acting as a revisionist axis spreading instability, the alliance could be said to have blunted revisionist (Israeli, Iraqi) ambitions, much as balancing theory predicts. Moreover, the alliance can be interpreted as part of a new system of alignments in the region after the virtual collapse of pan-Arab order in the 1980s left the region exposed to penetration. The power vacuum at the Arab core invited the formation of a new alliance to counter the growing dependence of most Arab states on American power.

The alliance's durability, in the wake of the Gulf war and Soviet collapse, as a counter to regional Western hegemony is potentially undermined by Syria's incorporation into the anti-Iraq coalition and the peace process. But, so far, bandwagoning—Syrian realignment with the West against Iran—is not in evidence. Rather, the alliance continues to give both states greater leverage in dealing with global hegemonic power than they would have separately. The Syrian alliance obstructs the Israeli and American attempt to isolate Iran. Syria seeks to increase its leverage in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations by exploiting Western fears of Iranian-backed fundamentalist resurgence in the event the peace process fails, while holding out the prospect of using its Iranian alliance to mute Iranian rejectionism.

The durability of the Syrian-Iranian alliance is exceptional in the Middle East. Yaniv (1987) argues that systemic features, such as the insecurity and high mistrust characteristic of the regional system leads to constantly shifting alliances, not durable ones. The durability of the Syrian-Iranian alliance must, therefore, be attributed to a multitude of overlapping strategic interests, since domestic politics does little to reinforce it. However, the rationality and pragmatism of elites and a degree of trust accumulated over time appear to be essential to the ability of the alliance to overcome the periodic strains which, in Yaniv's view, ought to have ruptured it.

SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION AND CONSTRAINTS ON FOREIGN POLICY

The structure of the global system constrains the manoeuvrability of regional middle powers like Syria and Iran. The previous loose bipolar structure maximized their freedom; the prospect of its supersession by a tightly constraining unipolarity gives regional powers a strong interest in a multipolar

balance in the region. Moreover, the more that developing states are penetrated and incorporated into the core-dominated economic dependency system, the less potential they have to act as autonomous powers; as such, regional middle powers typically attempt to minimize or diversify this economic dependency. It is the relatively lesser dependency of Syria and Iran which permits them to imitate the great-power-like behaviour determined by the norms of realist-described state system.

Over the long term, of course, the web of economic dependency can at best be modified in favour of an interdependence which itself requires accommodation with the core of the world capitalist system. The collapse of the communist bloc as patron of statist economies in Third World countries has greatly accelerated this tendency. Even in Iran and Syria, the requisites of capital accumulation have taken growing precedence and this dictates that accommodation supersede confrontation in foreign policy. Even in aiming to merely modify dependency, Syria and Iran are standing against the regional tide, namely, the economic and cultural penetration of the region by the West, the increasing incorporation of local elites into an international bourgeoisie differentiated from their own societies and, now, the breakdown of the barriers against penetration by the main Western outpost, Israel. In this environment regional middle powers like Syria and Iran must undertake a second kind of foreign policy omni-balancing, trying to manipulate trade-offs between defence of national autonomy and the requisites of capital accumulation. Strategies they employ for coping with economic pressures include continued state autonomy of indigenous and international capital, state management of economic liberalization processes, the use of rent and the attempt to diversify economic relations and hence dependencies.

REGIONAL MIDDLE POWERS, RADICAL MOVEMENTS IN LEBANON, AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Syrian and Iranian strategy towards Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations are key tests of their foreign policy orientation. Southern Lebanon is the main flashpoint where the Arab-Israeli conflict has been played out in the last decade and where Syrian, Iranian and Israeli power have most actively confronted each other, chiefly through Lebanese proxies.

Lebanon manifests a phenomenon exceptionally typical of the Middle East, the rise of radical movements combining resistance to external penetration with the grievances of victimized segments of the population expressed in indigenous cultural idiom. The highest costs of Lebanon's weakness were paid by the most deprived elements of the population, namely the Shi'a of the south. State collapse made Lebanon a crucible for

revisionist movements which recruited from these victimized groups. It also exacerbated the transnational penetration so typical of the region: all Lebanese factions sought external supporters. The purest case of a transstate alliance was Hizbollah, jointly mobilized by the Shi'a clergy of Iran and of Lebanon.

Since transstate 'movements of the deprived' (in Iranian parlance) are naturally a threat to the established order, they need protective patrons, while regional middle powers find them useful proxies to challenge Western penetration without provoking direct great power intervention against these states. Hence the Syria-Iran-Shi'a-rejectionist Palestinian axis in Lebanon. Syria has tried to harness Palestinian and Shi'a revisionism for limited goals, notably acquiring leverage in the peace process by demonstrating the consequences of failure to satisfy its interests. Iran under Khomeini had more revisionist ambitions, but under Rafsanjani it has subordinated its Lebanese policy to Syrian interests. It has encouraged the moderation of Hizbollah in order to preserve the only successful manifestation of the spread of the Islamic revolution beyond Iran.

In fact, Hizbollah shows that radical movements can quickly shed messianic goals for limited ones. Hizbollah now seeks not a Jihad against the Jewish state but the evacuation of Israel from southern Lebanon and containment of its penetration of Lebanon after a regional peace; internally, it no longer seeks an Islamic state in Lebanon but merely to peacefully propagate its values through the Lebanese political process and contain Israeli and Western penetration of Lebanon.

Syria's entry into the peace process discredits domestic politics models which see the conflict as necessary to the regime (Pipes 1990). But, unlike Western-dependent Arab regimes such as Egypt and Jordan, Syria interprets the peace negotiations with Israel as a zero-sum game, which is shaped by the balance of power, currently in Israel's favour. These negotiations therefore require the tenacious manipulation of every possible leverage at Syria's command. The outcome is seen as determining hegemony in the area and bearing on the Arabs' very ability to maintain any sense of nationhood and resist dissolution in a regional economic web dominated by the Western capitalist core and its regional Israeli extension.

Iran's attitude to the peace process is arguably less conventional than Syria's. Iran has seen the struggle with Israel as one of Islam against a Western surrogate state which would not end until Palestine was liberated. Yet, while an 'export of revolution model' may be plausible in explaining Iranian attitudes towards Israel under Khomeini, the more nuanced policy followed under Rafsanjani might be better interpreted according to Calvert's dramatic actor model. The regime wants to be seen to oppose the peace process, because its legitimacy and regional role depend on its struggle

against the 'Zionist entity' and because a peace settlement would isolate it ideologically. However, it is unlikely actually to do much to obstruct a settlement because its ability to affect the conflict is so limited as long as Syria and the Palestinians accept the peace process and because Iran's national interests, increasingly Gulf- and economic-centred, are not at stake. Iran's support for Palestinian Islamists is no longer viewed as part of a holy war against Israel but as strengthening Palestinian resistance to their 'Bantustanization'.

Both Iran and Syria are caught between a sense of threat from Israel and a realist awareness that, given the current unfavourable balance of regional power and their inevitable need for incorporation into the world economy, some accommodation with it is inevitable. A Syrian-Israeli peace could isolate Iran, but even after a peace settlement the two states will have considerable mutual interests in preserving their alliance.

CONCLUSION

While some observers expect global economic integration to dissolve national rivalries in the post-peace Middle East, Samuel P. Huntington (1993) has argued that a global conflict of civilizations has superseded Cold War bipolarity. A number of observers (Barber 1992) expect the decline of the state in the face of these conflicting transnational forces.

There is a sense in which Huntington is right: non-Western civilizations have been struggling against domination by the West for several centuries and continue to do so; the end of the cross-cutting 'East-West' cleavage only highlights it more sharply. But civilizational differences need not result in irreconcilable zero-sum conflict. The conflict is only likely to be zero-sum if the West continues to insist that indigenous interests must be subordinated to its hegemony over Middle Eastern oil, to preserving Israeli dominance and to intervention on behalf of client regimes.

Indeed, if the peace process merely sanctifies Israeli dominance without satisfying Palestinian national rights, economic ties are unlikely to create the 'complex interdependence' able to bridge interstate conflicts in the Middle East. Rather, if history is any indication, the combination of Western hegemony and Israeli penetration of the region may well stimulate renewed reactions in the form of nationalist or Islamic anti-system movements. But, contrary to Huntington, the conflict is less a civilizational one over values than one about domination and resistance. Nor, if Syria and Iran are any indication, are states being swept away or rendered irrelevant by transnational forces. While the forces of 'McWorld' (Barber 1992) are, in a post-bipolar world, more intense and uniform than ever and represent an increasing constraint on the Third World, those states which enjoy some autonomy,

may be able to better manage these forces. Syria and Iran represent the key remaining regimes (with the defeat of Iraq) which continue to express the resistance of indigenous nationalism and Islamism to Western policies towards oil and Israel. Far from being rendered irrelevant, these states continue to actively manage their environment: one can say that they seek, in Barber's terms, to harness 'Jihad' to defend the autonomy allowing them to come to terms with 'McWorld'.

As such, these states, rather than being driven by unremitting ideological hostility, largely play the game of global politics by its historical rules, namely, pursuit of limited national interests and spheres of influence. If this is sometimes expressed by a seemingly ideological hostility to Western influence, that is only relative to the exceptional intensity of Western penetration. If the West feels threatened by Islamic or nationalist movements in the Middle East, the best way to contain them would be to accommodate the legitimate interests of the two states, Syria and Iran, which represent the most institutionalized residue of these ideologies.

Appendix: chronology of Syrian-Iranian relations

12 February 1979: The imperial government in Iran is no more. Syria and the USSR are the first two countries to extend recognition to the new regime.

13 February 1979: Baghdad recognizes the new Iranian regime.

17 February 1979: Chairman Arafat arrives in Tehran for a six-day visit.

5 August 1980: President Hussein of Iraq visits Saudi Arabia, rumoured to be discussing the possibility of attacking Iran.

18 August 1980: Iraq and Syria break off diplomatic relations.

22 September 1980: Iraqi forces invade Iranian territory in the southwest and bomb Tehran and other Iranian cities.

November 1980: Hojjatoleslam Rafsanjani makes his first post-revolution trip to Syria before visiting Libya and Algeria.

Syria boycotts the Arab Heads of State summit in Amman and denounces the 'suspicious relations' prevailing between Jordan and Iraq.

It is reported that Syria has massed 30,000 troops and 1,000 tanks on its border with Jordan.

January 1981: A team of Iranian officials visit Syria (and Libya and Algeria) to explore economic cooperation opportunities.

April 1981: Syrian planes (according to Dilip Hiro (1988a)) give air cover to Iranian aircraft as the latter bomb the Iraqi air base of Al Walid.

25 May 1981: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is formed.

15 September 1981: At the behest of Syria (and Libya) Iranian Prime Minister Mousavi is invited to attend the Tripoli meeting of the Arab Steadfastness Front.

October 1981: Rumours abound that Iran and Syria have signed an arms deal.

14 December 1981: The Israeli Knesset votes in favour of annexing the Golan Heights.

March 1982: Following the five-day visit of Khaddam and a series of meetings between Iranian and Syrian officials, the two countries sign a ten-year trade pact.

8 April 1982: In a clear pro-Iran move, Syria closes its border to Iraq and the pipeline for Iraqi oil exports through the Mediterranean. This move deprives Iraq of about 40 per cent of its oil revenue.

May 1982: In the aftermath of the fall of Khoramshahr to Iranian forces and in the face of Iraqi demands for Arab military assistance, Syrian influence in Arab circles successfully blocks any Arab moves to help Baghdad militarily.

6 June 1982: Israeli invasion of Lebanon and immediate Iranian support for Lebanon and Syria.

September 1982: After the second Fez Arab Summit the Syrian Information Minister is despatched to Tehran to calm Iranian concerns over Damascus' role in the summit and its support for summit resolutions.

January 1983: The Foreign Ministers of Iran, Libya and Syria meet in Damascus. Syria and Libya issue a joint communiqué after the meeting stating that they will stand by Iran.

February 1983: Minister Gharazi arrives in Syria and the Syrian Minister of Information visits Iran.

March 1983: Syrian Ministers of Oil and Commerce make separate trips to Iran.

31 March 1983: Foreign Minister Velayati states in Tehran that: 'Our relations with Syria are strategic and we view the political, economic, and

cultural relations between the two countries as strategic.’

April 1983: Foreign Minister Velayati visits Damascus. For the Iranian year March 1983–March 1984 Iran offers Syria one million tons of oil on top of the agreed five million target as a grant.

July 1983: Minister Nourbakhsh visits Syria.

August 1983: Foreign Minister Velayati returns to Damascus to discuss joint cooperation.

November 1983: Syrian Minister of Health visits Tehran. Lebanon breaks off diplomatic relations with Iran because of the continuing presence of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the country.

January 1984: Syrian Minister of Economy and Deputy Prime Minister make separate trips to Iran. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikholeslam, visits Damascus.

February 1984: Syrian Minister of Education visits Iran. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikholeslam, visits Damascus for the second time in two months. Iranian Minister of Commerce pays a short visit to Damascus to discuss prospects for cooperation.

April 1984: Syrian Minister of Oil visits Iran.

May 1984: Syrian Economy Minister makes a trip to Iran to discuss economic cooperation between the two countries, followed by Vice-President Khaddam and the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Iranian Minister of Transportation pays a visit to Syria to discuss transportation links between the two countries.

July 1984: Foreign Minister Velayati pays a visit to Damascus. Lebanon re-establishes diplomatic relations with Iran.

4 August 1984: Minister of the Revolutionary Guards, Rafiq-doust, arrives in Syria to discuss Syrian-Iranian cooperation in Lebanon as well as the scope for broader military ties between the two countries.

6 September 1984: President Khamenei of Iran heads a high-level delegation, comprising of Foreign Minister Velayati, Minister of the Revolutionary

Guards, Rafiq-doust, Commander of the Iranian Ground Forces, Shirazi and several Majlis deputies, to Syria (and Libya and Algeria).
Syrian Industry Minister pays a visit to Iran.

November 1984: Vice-President Khaddam holds talks with Iranian officials in the Iranian capital.
Ayatollah Ardebilli visits Damascus.

June 1985: Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani visits Syria.

May 1985: Damascus mediates between Tehran and Riyadh, which culminates in the Saudi Foreign Minister's trip to Tehran.

August 1985: The Majlis approves a ten-year contract under which Iran agrees to supply Syria with one million tons of crude oil, free of charge, and up to five million tons at US\$2.5 per barrel below international prices.

December 1985: Foreign Minister Velayati heads an Iranian delegation to Saudi Arabia. Hojjatoleslam Khatami, meanwhile, visits Syria.
Syrian Vice-President Khaddam pays a visit to Tehran and meets with top-level Iranian policy-makers.

28 June 1986: During the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister's visit to Damascus the two countries reiterate that their alliance is 'strategic'.

July 1986: Amidst Jordanian mediation between Baghdad and Damascus, Syria-Iran relations hit a serious low.

12 September 1986: Syrian delegation visits Iran as Iranian and Syrian differences over Lebanon widen.

28 October 1986: Four Syrian soldiers are reported kidnapped by Hizbollah forces based in the Bekaa.

3 November 1986: Syria releases knowledge of Iran-US-Israel arms deal through the Lebanese periodical, *Al-Shiraa*.
Reports also emerge that Syria's chargé d'affaires has been kidnapped in Tehran.

7 November 1986: Asad declares that Syria cannot support the (Iranian) occupation of Iraqi territory.

6 February 1987: Syria endorses Islamic Conference Organization's meeting's criticism of Iran for not accepting peace with Iraq.

24 February 1987: 20 Hizbollah fighters killed in clashes with Syrian forces. Iranian press reacts angrily to the Syrian attacks on Hizbollah targets and Ayatollah Montazeri sends letters to the Lebanese Shi'a ulama calling for punishment of Syrian forces.

6 March 1987: Syrian forces enter West Beirut in strength in support of Damascus' own Lebanese allies.

20 March 1987: Mohtashemi visits Damascus to reach agreement with Syria not to curb Hizbollah's freedom of action.

27 April 1987: The Iraqi and Syrian Presidents hold their first meeting since August 1980 in Jordan.

20 July 1987: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 598 demanding an immediate end to the hostilities between Iran and Iraq.

21 July 1987: Hizbollah organizes demonstrations in the Bekaa against the UN's adoption of SCR 598.

28 July 1987: Iraqi anti-aircraft fire brings down a Syrian MiG-21 fighter aircraft.

September 1987: Syrian forces re-enter West Beirut in order to curb Hizbollah's influence.

8 November 1987: Having already signed the Arab States' Amman Summit's condemnation of Iran for not accepting SCR 598, Syria blocks a call for a total Arab break with Iran.

2 February 1988: Syria opens embassy in Oman.

24 April 1988: After many years of absence, Chairman Arafat returns to Damascus.

6 May 1988–4 June 1988: Clashes occur between Amal and Hizbollah forces in Lebanon. Iranian Revolutionary Guards are seen fighting on Hizbollah's side. Iran and Syria embark on a coordinated strategy to end the fighting, which has cost 148 lives in six days. Iran and Syria form a joint

committee of the rivals to address the warring parties' grievances. With this act Syria acknowledges Iran's political role in Lebanon.

18 July 1988: After a series of battle defeats, Tehran accepts SCR 598.

3 January 1989: Foreign Minister Shara'a of Syria visits Iran.

3 February 1989: Iran and Syria co-sponsor settlement of conflict between Amal and Hizbollah—the first time that Damascus has allowed any outside power such a role in Lebanon.

27 March 1989: Iraq and Saudi Arabia sign non-aggression pact.

May 1989: General Aoun, armed by Iraq, challenges Syria's presence in Lebanon.

July 1989: Frustrated with Arab reactions to Baghdad's involvement in Lebanon, Syria turns to Tehran for assistance in its campaign against General Aoun and his allies. Over the next few weeks joint Amal-Hizbollah operations against General Aoun's forces are launched.

28 August 1989: A meeting of anti-Aoun Lebanese forces held in Tehran. Fourteen groups participate in the meeting. In the second round of talks in Damascus some 21 nationalist and Islamic groups take part. These meetings strengthen Syria's hand in its contacts with its Arab counterparts.

October 1989: It is clear by the autumn of 1989 that the Iraqi involvement in Lebanon has solidified the Tehran-Damascus axis despite the fact that the two parties do not see eye to eye over the future of Lebanon.

6 October 1989: Syria's allies (including Nabih Berri, several Hizbollah sheikhs, Junblatt, Abu Musa and Ahmad Jibril) meet in Tehran.

November 1989: Syria and some of its allies accept the Taif agreement. Iran and a number of Lebanese groups reject the agreement.

17 November 1989: Foreign Minister Velayati in Damascus, orchestrating Lebanese opposition to the Taif agreement. Iran's line on Taif threatens the alliance as it pushes Syria back towards the Arab fold.

January 1990: Renewed Amal-Hizbollah clashes reflect increased tensions in the alliance. Hizbollah captures several Amal positions in southern

Bekaa. The Syrian-Egyptian *rapprochement* has added to problems in bilateral relations between Tehran and Damascus.

9 May 1990: Despite tremendous pressures from other Arab states Syria announces its refusal to attend the 'emergency' Arab Heads of State Summit in Baghdad.

30 May 1990: At the Baghdad Arab Summit President Hussein emerges as the dominant Arab figure.

18 July 1990: In Cairo, Asad says he is ready for peace talks with Israel under certain preconditions.

2 August 1990: Iraq invades Kuwait.

10 August 1990: Arab League Summit calls for Iraqi withdrawal and agrees to send troops to defend Saudi Arabia.

28 August 1990: Emergency Arab Summit in Cairo resolves to send troops from member countries to Saudi Arabia.

30 August 1990: Vice-President Khaddam arrives in Tehran to coordinate the two countries' policies towards the Kuwait crisis.

14 September 1990: Tariq Aziz visits Tehran to offer 'peace deal'.

24 September 1990: President Asad visits Tehran—his first visit to the Islamic Republic—amidst reports that the alliance has been damaged by Syria's decision to join the coalition. Iran continues to condemn the Iraqi invasion but insists that Western military intervention is not the solution.

An important outcome of the Syrian President's trip to Iran is an agreement to set up a permanent higher committee of the two countries' Vice-Presidents and Foreign Ministers to supervise mutual interests and to meet periodically to discuss bilateral relations as well as to develop joint policies on matters of regional importance.

25 September 1990: Iran and Syria announce joint policy on the Gulf crisis. They agree to work for an end to 'Iraqi aggression and the foreign presence in the Gulf'.

27 September 1990: In a show of unity, Presidents Rafsanjani and Asad issue joint communiqué praising the alliance.

3 October 1990: Syrian military leaders meet with the Hizbollah leadership at Musawi's house in Lebanon to resolve the dispute with Amal.

26 October 1990: Syrian forces move against General Aoun.

November 1990: Presidents Bush and Asad hold important meeting to discuss the Gulf crisis, Iran and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

7 December 1990: Beirut is reunited after a long period of separation. The Lebanese army enters the Iqlim al-Tuffah region as Hizbollah and Amal troops withdraw.

11 December 1990: Leaders of Islamic Jihad of Palestine meet with Ayatollah Khamenei and hail Iran's initiative to convene the first Islamic conference on Palestine.

18 December 1990: Hojjatoleslam Mohtashemi criticizes Syria's role in the Gulf crisis and attacks the Iranian government for its 'weak' support of the Palestinian *intifada* and Lebanese Islamic movements.

26 January 1991: Syrian and Iranian Vice-Presidents meet and affirm the need to protect the territorial integrity of Iraq.

6 March 1991: The birth of the '6+2' Arab group, based on the Damascus Declaration. The group brings together the GCC countries with Syria and Egypt and gives the latter two countries a say in Gulf security matters.

9 March 1991: A senior Iranian official, Larijani, criticizes the Damascus Declaration, stating that neither Syria nor Egypt are Gulf powers and therefore should not be privy to discussions about Persian Gulf security matters.

22 March 1991: Syria assures Iran that the Damascus Declaration will not affect their alliance or bypass Iran in any cooperation between the Arab signatories of the declaration.

26 April 1991: US Secretary of State visits Syria and meets with the Syrian leadership to discuss the Arab-Israeli peace conference.

30 April 1991: President Rafsanjani arrives for his first trip to Syria as the Iranian President. During his three days in Damascus he meets with President Asad and other senior Syrian officials. Asad assures Rafsanjani that Iran's

pivotal role in the Persian Gulf was not compromised by the Damascus Declaration. Rafsanjani persuades Asad to allow Hizbollah forces to remain armed.

4 May 1991: In a speech, President Rafsanjani states that Tehran's differences with Damascus are over details, 'differences between friends'.

31 May 1991: Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Friendship is agreed upon.

July 1991: After months of American mediation and media speculation, Syria announces that it is ready to participate in a peace conference with Israel.

26 July 1991: Syria becomes the first country to accept Secretary Baker's Arab-Israeli peace conference proposals. Iran reacts angrily to this announcement and accuses Syria of weakening the cause of Muslim Palestine.

July 1991: Syria and Lebanon sign a Treaty of Brotherhood and Cooperation.

7 August 1991: Iranian Interior Minister Nouri arrives in Damascus. While in Syria he says that the alliance remains strong irrespective of the proposed peace process.

5 October 1991: Foreign Minister Velayati says that Iran does not 'accept the 1947 partition of Palestine and believe the whole of Palestine must be liberated'.

14 October 1991: Reports emerge that Lebanon and Syria are arranging withdrawal of Iranian Revolutionary Guards from Lebanon.

21 October 1991: Tehran hosts alternative Palestine conference in support of the 'Islamic revolution in Palestine'. The conference attracts most of the Palestinian and Lebanese Islamist and secular Arab rejectionist forces. Four hundred delegates from 60 countries participate in the conference.

31 October 1991: The Madrid peace conference opens, in the presence of all the parties to the conflict.

January-December 1992: Second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth rounds of Middle East peace talks take place in Washington.

22 January 1992: Khaddam in Tehran to pool efforts in creating a viable Iraqi opposition to the Saddam Hussein regime.

19 April 1992: President Asad embarks on a tour of the GCC countries, making Saudi Arabia his first destination.

8 May 1992: PKK reportedly pulled out of the Bekaa Valley under Turkish pressure on Syria.

15 May 1992: Foreign Minister Velayati visits Beirut and holds meetings with Lebanese government officials and not with Hizbollah leaders.

19 September 1992: Syrian Foreign Minister Shara'a arrives in Tehran, reportedly to mediate between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the three Gulf islands dispute.

October 1992: In Lebanon's first parliamentary elections since the ending of the civil war Hizbollah succeeds in acquiring eight seats.

11 October 1992: Syria hosts a meeting of officials from Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan in order to finalize an agreement for the linking of the five countries' electricity grids.

23 October 1992: Visiting Syrian Interior Minister holds talks with Iranian Vice-President Habibi.

15 November 1992: The Foreign Ministers of Iran, Syria and Turkey meet in Ankara to discuss the situation in northern Iraq.

December 1992: Tehran and Hizbollah oppose Rafiq Hariri's appointment as Lebanese Prime Minister because of his known Saudi connections, but he manages to keep his post by winning Damascus' approval for his appointment.

January 1993: Hizbollah's Sheikh Fadhallah asserts that Israel's existence had to be accepted.

3 January 1993: Syrian Vice-President Khaddam arrives in Tehran for talks. In the next three days he holds meetings with top Iranian officials, including President Rafsanjani.

6 January 1993: Before his departure from Tehran, Vice-President Khaddam expresses Syria's willingness to intervene between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the disputed Persian Gulf islands issue.

10 February 1993: The Foreign Ministers of Iran, Turkey and Syria meet in Damascus to discuss the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

18 May 1993: Foreign Minister Velayati starts a tour of the GCC countries.

2 June 1993: Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Ali Mohammad Besharati, arrives in Damascus and holds talks with the Syrian Foreign Minister. Their discussion covers Iran's growing ties with the GCC states. It was reported in late May that Oman had begun mediating between Tehran and Cairo.

30 July 1993: Foreign Minister Velayati delivers message from President Rafsanjani to his Syrian counterpart.

2 August 1993: President Rafsanjani states that Iran is the only country that openly supports 'the Islamic resistance in south Lebanon'.

13 September 1993: Israel and the PLO sign Declaration of Principles in Washington.

14 September 1993: President Rafsanjani calls the Declaration of Principles the biggest treason committed by the PLO against the Palestinian people.

18 September 1993: Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikholeslam meets President Asad in Damascus to discuss the situation in Lebanon, the peace process and in particular the implications for the countries of the Israeli-PLO accords. Sheikholeslam also delivers a verbal message to the Syrian President from his Iranian counterpart.

27 September 1993: President Rafsanjani and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia discuss international oil prices in a telephone conversation and aim to give OPEC members more cohesion in pricing and production policies.

30 September 1993: President Rafsanjani and the Kuwaiti leader, Sheikh Jaber al-Sabah, discuss recent regional developments and the outcome of the OPEC meeting in Geneva in a telephone conversation.

7 October 1993: Ayatollah Khamenei gives an audience to the visiting leader of the (Palestinian) Islamic Jihad organization, Dr Fathi Shaqaqi.

11 November 1993: Secretary-General of Hizbollah, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, meets with President Rafsanjani in Tehran.

21 November 1993: In recognition of the alliance, the Syrian government awards its prestigious 'Golden Sword' emblem to the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Brigadier Mohsen Rezai.

1 December 1993: The leader of HAMAS, Musa Abu Marzuq, meets with President Rafsanjani.

13 December 1993: Iranian Vice-President Habibi and Foreign Minister Velayati, heading what both countries call a 'top-level' delegation, arrive in Damascus for four days of talks.

14 December 1993: Iran, Syria and Lebanon oppose the UN's resolution endorsing the Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles. When put to the vote, 155 UN members are in favour of the resolution.

15 December 1993: Iranian Vice-President Habibi meets with Seyyed Nasrallah of Hizbollah in Damascus to discuss the situation in Lebanon.

16 December 1993: Habibi declares Tehran's support for the 'revolutionary and Islamic stand of Syria in its campaign against the Zionist regime'. In a meeting with President Asad, Asad is said to have 'lauded Iran's stance *vis-à-vis* the issue of Palestine'.

24 January 1994: Chairman Arafat makes his first trip to Saudi Arabia since the Kuwait crisis of 1990/1.

President Ezer Weisman of Israel, on official trip to Turkey, meets with the Turkish Prime Minister Çiller and President Demirel.

6 February 1994: Foreign Minister Velayati meets with his Syrian and Turkish counterparts in Ankara as part of their tripartite meeting to monitor the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

8 March 1994: King Hussein makes his first trip to Saudi Arabia since the Kuwait crisis of 1990/1.

12 March 1994: Iran reports that two 'sound bombs' had been thrown into the Syrian embassy's compound in Tehran.

4 June 1994: Foreign Minister Velayati meets with President Asad in Damascus; delivers message from President Rafsanjani.

11 July 1994: The head of Lebanon's Supreme Shi'a Assembly meets with President Rafsanjani in Tehran.

25 July 1994: At a ceremony in Washington Israel and Jordan end the state of war that had prevailed between them since 1948.

21 August 1994: Foreign Minister Velayati leaves for Damascus to join a high-level tripartite meeting on northern Iraq with his Syrian and Turkish counterparts. This will be the three countries' sixth meeting on Iraq.

11 September 1994: Syrian and Israeli ambassadors to the USA meet to discuss bilateral relations.

17 October 1994: Jordanian and Israeli Prime Ministers initial a historic peace treaty between the two countries near Amman.

18 October 1994: President Asad, speaking in Cairo, calls the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel 'blasphemous', but also says that Syria would not stand in the way of Jordan making peace with Israel.

19 October 1994: Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman condemns the Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

26 October 1994: The Jordan-Israel peace treaty is signed on their joint border near the Arava desert.

Ayatollah Khamenei warns that the Islamic Republic will not forgive those Arab leaders who sign peace treaties with Israel and reiterates that his country will not agree to make peace with Israel.

28 October 1994: *Ha'aretz*, the Israeli daily newspaper, reveals that senior Israeli and Syrian army officers had been holding regular clandestine meetings on security issues for 'more than a year'.

29 December 1994: A senior Iranian diplomat in Damascus hand-delivers a message from Foreign Minister Velayati to his Syrian counterpart.

6 January 1995: Syrian Foreign Minister meets with President Rafsanjani in Tehran and delivers message from President Asad.

13 January 1995: An Iranian 'cultural adviser' meets with visiting Syrian Islamic Endowments Minister.

8 February 1995: Iranian Foreign Ministry issues a statement highly critical of the '6+2' groupings position on Iran and the islands dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

19 May 1995: Iranian Minister of Higher Education arrives in Damascus. He meets with Syrian Vice-President Khaddam and Prime Minister al-Zubi to discuss cultural cooperation. During this trip he visits Aleppo University and meets with the teachers of Persian language at the university.

22 June 1995: Syrian Vice-President Khaddam and Foreign Minister Shara'a arrive in Tehran for the seventh session of the Iran-Syria Supreme Joint Committee. Over the next two days they meet with Vice-President Habibi and President Rafsanjani.

2 September 1995: Vice-President Khaddam arrives in Tehran for talks about the situation in Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous areas, where the KDP has accused the two regimes of supporting the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) against Turkey. He reports that he has a message for the Iranian President from President Asad 'on current developments in the region'. Iranian Vice-President Habibi states that the trip was in response to the 'need for Tehran and Damascus to discuss and exchange views on the developments in the region'.

30 September 1995: The Israeli and Omani Foreign Ministers meet at the UN (New York) and agree to establish trade links.

26 October 1995: The leader of the Palestinian group, Islamic Jihad, is shot dead by unknown assailants in Malta. His killers are said to be members of the Israeli security forces.

4 November 1995: Prime Minister Rabin is assassinated by an Israeli Right-winger after a Labour-led peace rally in Tel Aviv. One-third of Arab states send high-level representatives to Israel for the late Prime Minister's funeral.

15 December 1995: In an effort to get the Syrian-Israeli track moving, Warren Christopher arrives in the region and holds a four-hour meeting with President Asad (16 December).

26 December 1995: Deputy Foreign Ministers of Iran, Syria and Turkey hold talks on 'security issues and the situation in Iraq'. The Turkish and Syrian teams also meet with Foreign Minister Velayati. It is agreed that the

Foreign Ministers of the three countries should meet in March 1996, possibly in Istanbul.

27–29 December 1995: Syrian and Israeli officials hold direct talks in Washington.

28 December 1995: Another ‘6+2’ declaration is issued in Damascus, again attacking Iran for its continuing ‘occupation of the Abu Musa and Tonb Islands’.

30 December 1995: Amidst fierce Iranian media criticisms of Syria’s policies towards the Arab-Israeli peace process and its support for the latest Damascus Declaration, Iranian Vice-President Habibi announces the cancellation of his forthcoming trip to Syria.

30–31 December 1995: Syria and Israel agree to extend their US-hosted bilateral talks.

31 December 1995: Syrian Ambassador, Ahmad al-Hassan, is said to have rushed to the Iranian Foreign Ministry to offer an explanation for Syria’s stance in the ‘6+2’ talks in Damascus and to reiterate the importance of the Syrian-Iranian alliance to Syria.

10 January 1996: US Secretary of State is in Damascus to provide further impetus for the Syrian-Israeli peace talks.

16 January 1996: Foreign Minister Velayati, while visiting Kuwait, states that relations between Iran and Syria continue to be ‘good and brotherly’. He does confirm, however, that Tehran is unhappy about the new Syrian-Israeli dialogue.

17 January 1996: Iranian media announces the Syrian Prime Minister, Zubi, is to visit Iran in February.

31 January 1996: The third round of Syrian-Israeli talks, focusing mainly on ‘security arrangements’ end in Wye plantation, Maryland.

February 1996: More evidence emerges that relations between Turkey and Iran have been worsening in recent months. Ankara has accused Tehran of shipping arms to PKK’s Kurdish guerrillas based in Syria. This follows Turkey’s complaints that Tehran has allowed the PKK to operate from camps in western Iran.

20 February 1996: Syrian Prime Minister calls off a scheduled visit to Tehran.

27 February 1996: The delayed visit of Iranian Vice-President Habibi to Syria starts. On his three-day trip he meets with his Syrian counterpart as well as with Palestinian rejectionist leaders and Iraqi opposition groups. Later, the Iranian Vice-President pays an official visit to Lebanon and reiterates his government's support for the 'Palestinian resistance movement'.

1 March 1996: Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikholeslam, visits Lebanon and meets with the Lebanese Foreign Minister and other officials.

11–14 March 1996: Following a military cooperation accord signed between the two countries in mid-February, during his trip to Israel, President Demirel of Turkey acknowledges the emergence of a new 'strategic alliance' between the two countries. This announcement is said to be causing great concern in Iran and Syria.

13 March 1996: In the aftermath of several terrorist bombings in Israel, the Sharm al-Shaikh 'Anti-Terrorism' Summit gets under way, with 29 world leaders present. Twelve Arab leaders participate in the summit. Syria refuses to attend the summit and Iran is not invited.

1–2 April 1996: Israeli Prime Minister Peres, leading a high-level Israeli delegation, pays an official visit to Qatar and Oman.

11 April 1996: After weeks of escalating tensions and tit-for-tat raids between the Israeli and South Lebanese Army (SLA) troops and Hizbollah forces, the IDF launches major attacks against the Hizbollah strongholds in Lebanon, attacking Beirut for the first time in 14 years. The fate of the Arab-Israeli peace process is in the balance as Israel vows to 'eradicate once and for all' the Hizbollah threat to its northern border.

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